OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro* GAMER

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THE GREATEST NES GAMES

Original Nintendo Seal of Quality

Readers and developers reveal their favourite games for Nintendo's iconic console

■ OPERATION THUNDERBOLT ■ TITUS SOFTWARE ■ MARK HEALEY ■ AMSTRAD GX 4000 ■ RESIDENT EVIL ■ WINTER GAMES ■ BATMAN ■ RCA STUDIO II ■ ROAD RASH ■ ALADDIN ■ CITADEL

ip IMAGINE PUBLISHING
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ISSUE 139

THE RETROBATES

FAVOURITE NES GAME



DARRAN JONES

I'm going to choose *Metroid*. It's a fantastic, well-crafted adventure that grows on me every time I return to it.

Expertise:
Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine

Currently playing:
Amped

Favourite game of all time:
Strider



NICK THORPE

Castlevania III is my pick, as it builds on the first game well and has an awesome soundtrack. I really should pick up a copy…

Expertise:
Owning six Master Systems (he sold one)

Currently playing:
Twisted Metal

Favourite game of all time:
Sonic The Hedgehog



PAUL DRURY

It's hard not to pick *Super Mario Bros.* I can still recall the giddy thrill of discovering Warp Zone and seeing that beanstalk sprout up into the clouds. Magical stuff.

Expertise:
Virtual puppeteering

Currently playing:
Grim Fandango

Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



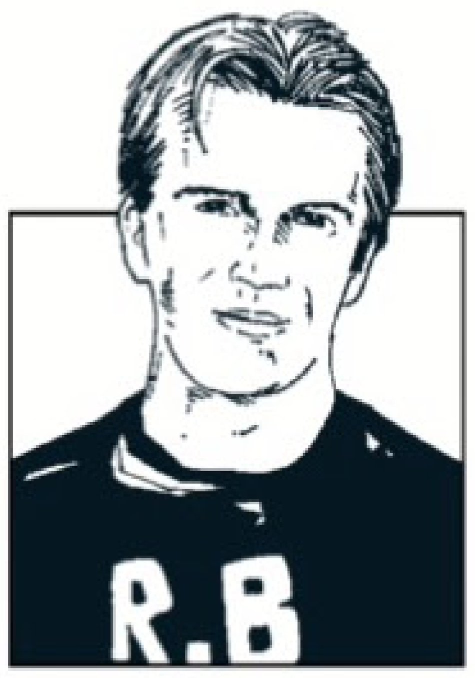
JONATHAN WELLS

I'm going to go for *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2*. I got it with my NES all those years ago and still got it today.

Expertise:
Takling dirty nappies and retro spreads

Currently playing:
Destiny

Favourite game of all time:
Day Of The Tentacle



RICHARD BURTON

Solar Jetman: Hunt For The Golden Warship from Rare. It's a testing game and it is really enjoyable to play with 12 cavernous levels to explore.

Expertise:
ZX Spectrum, Amstrad CPC, ZX Spectrum, ZX81, and the ZX Spectrum

Currently playing:
Joe Blade

Favourite game of all time:
Manic Miner



DAVID CROOKES

Super Mario Bros. 3 may have been massively hyped at the time but it was totally justified. Mario was in the clouds and I was on cloud nine.

Expertise:
Amstrad, Lynx, adventures, Dizzy, and PlayStation (but is that retro? Debate!)

Currently playing:
Grim Fandango

Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



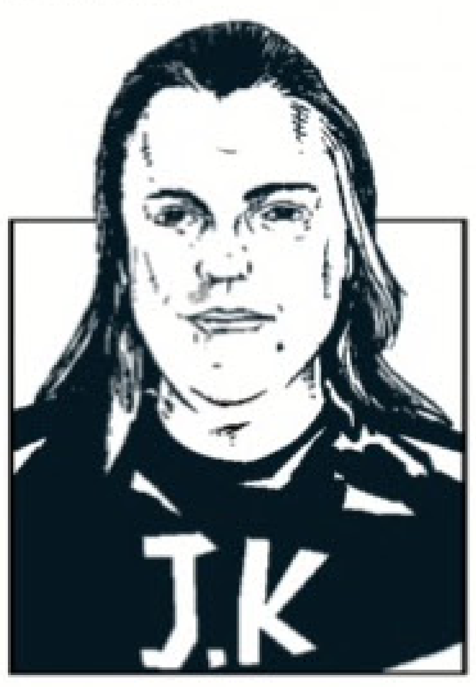
MARTYN CARROLL

The original *Super Mario Bros.*, or the Japanese '*Lost Levels*' sequel if I'm feeling fearless.

Expertise:
Sinclair computers, Spectrum software

Currently playing:
Super Mario 3D World

Favourite game of all time:
Jet Set Willy



JASON KELK

I will probably have to go with *Gradius*, but there are a couple of other blasters that are a very close second!

Expertise:
Being a homebrew hero

Currently playing:
Hawkmoon (Atari 8-bit)

Favourite game of all time:
Io

LOADING…

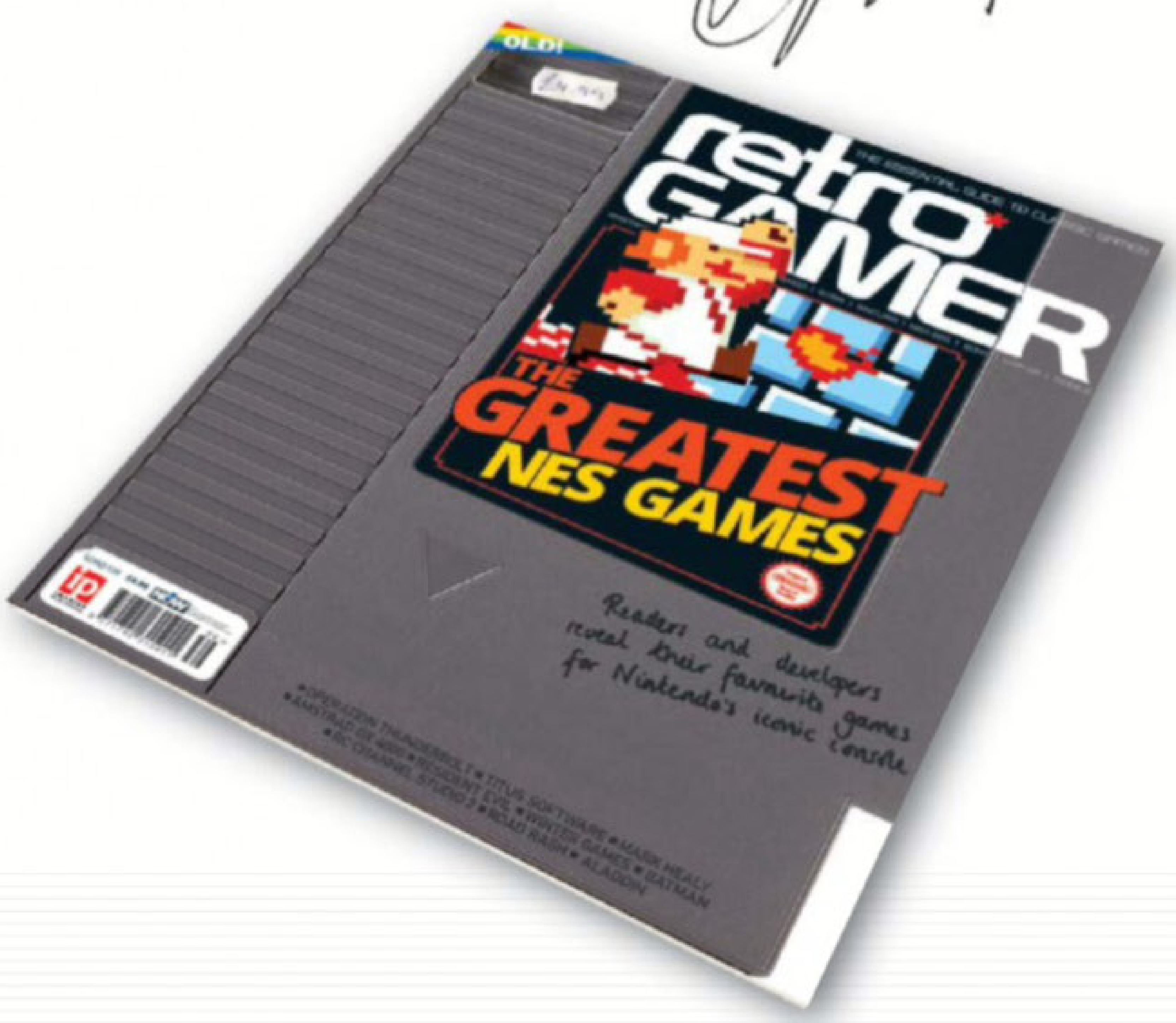


My first experience with a NES was in Boots, back when it still used to sell videogames. Whenever I was visiting the shops I'd always ask to wait in Boots so that I could play on the NES that was proudly on display there. I became extremely good at both *Super Mario Bros.* and *Duck Hunt* and craved a system of my very own, but the prohibitively high nature of the carts meant I had to wait until I started working before I could buy my first games system.

Being a Sega boy I eventually plumped for Sega's Master System, thanks to its slick arcade conversions and gems like *Wonder Boy III: The Dragon's Trap*. I never forgot about that NES however and would return to it whenever I had the chance. The machine wasn't massively popular where I lived, but I nonetheless found a couple of friends who owned the console and was soon playing a whole host of great games, from *Mega Man* to *The Legend Of Zelda* and *Metroid*.

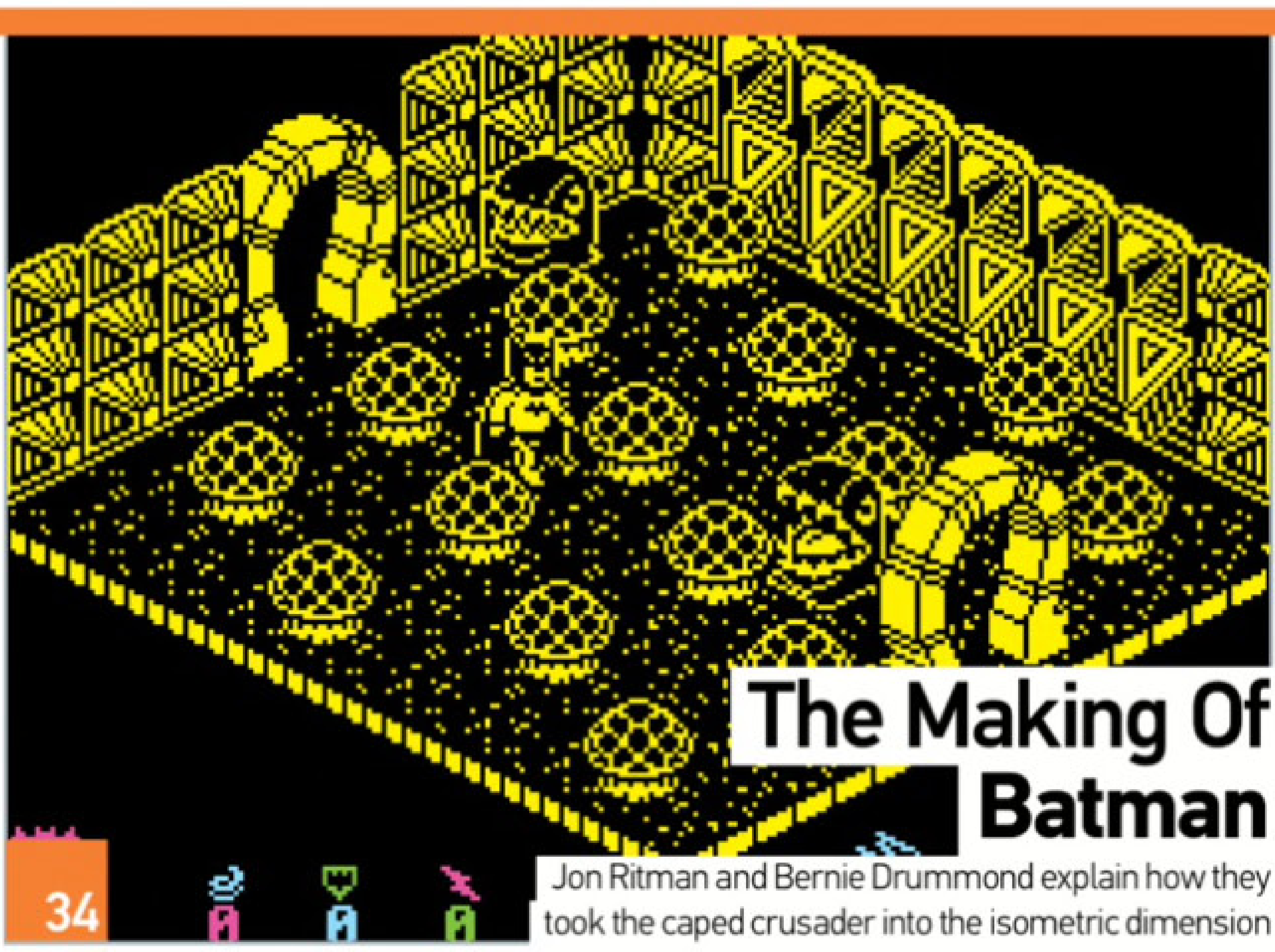
It's pleasing then to see that so many of the games I used to enjoy back in the day are also shared by yourselves. We clearly all have great taste in games.

Enjoy the magazine!



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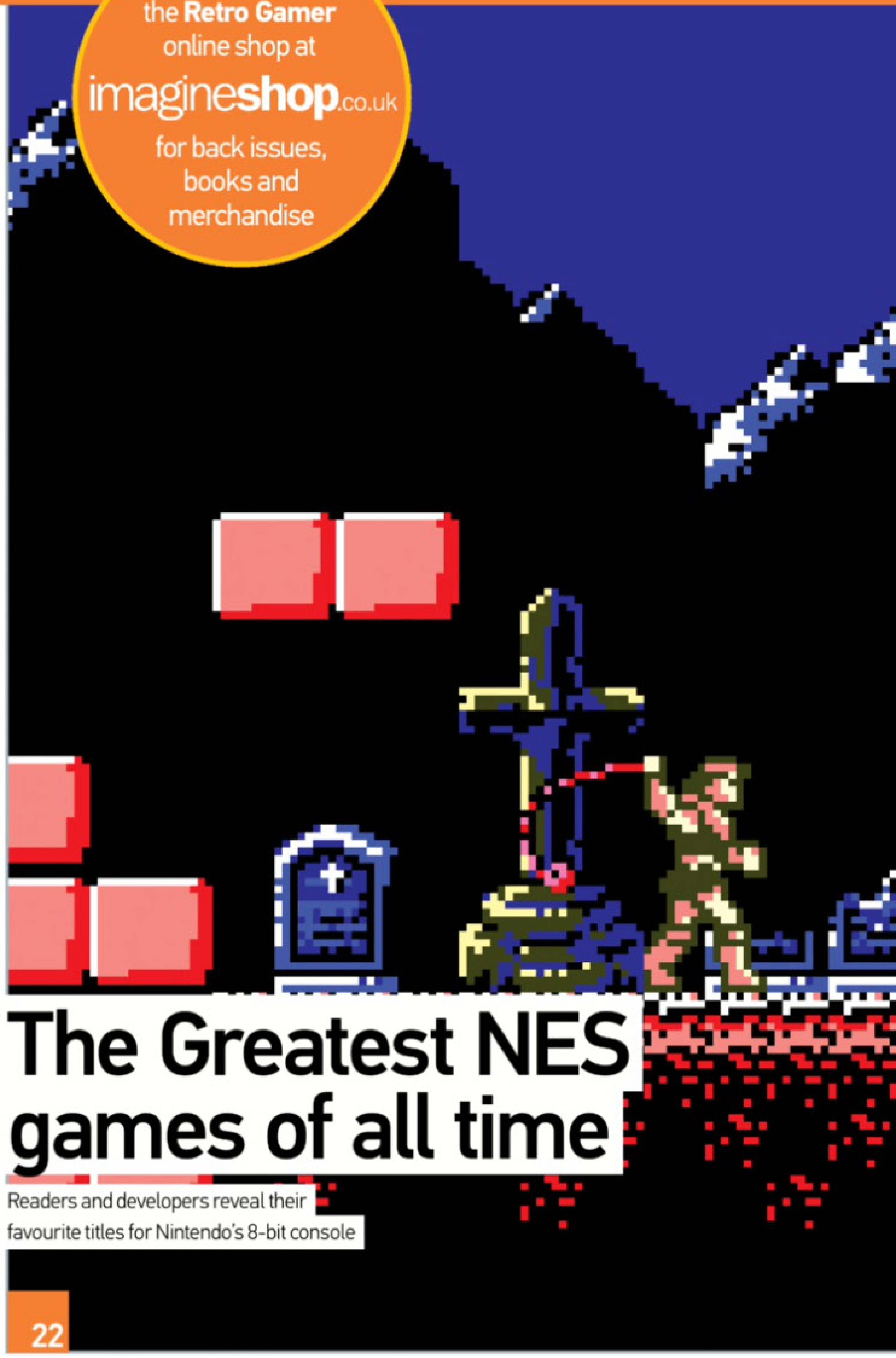
>> Load 139 Breathing new life into classic games

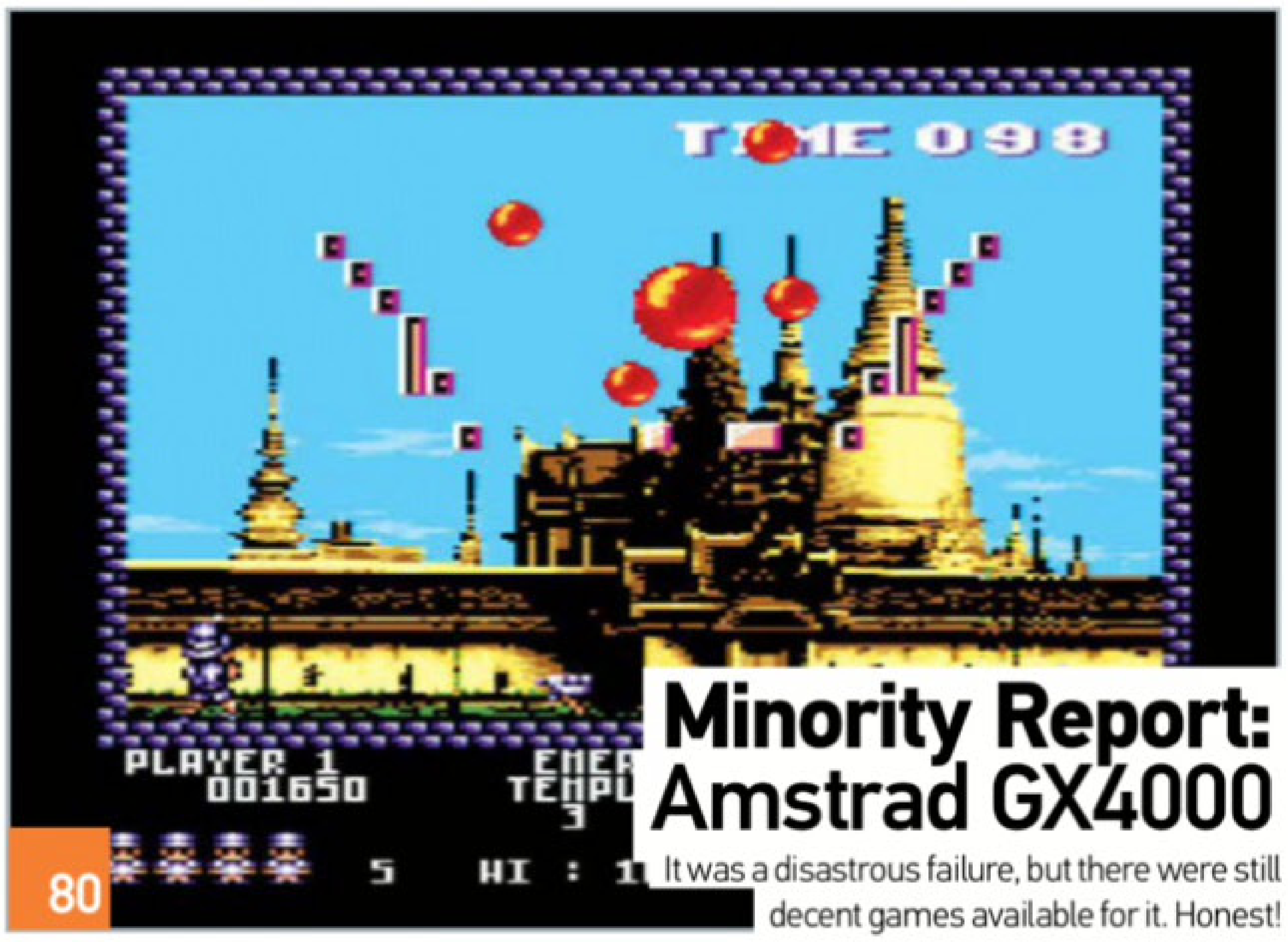


RETRO RADAR

REVIVALS

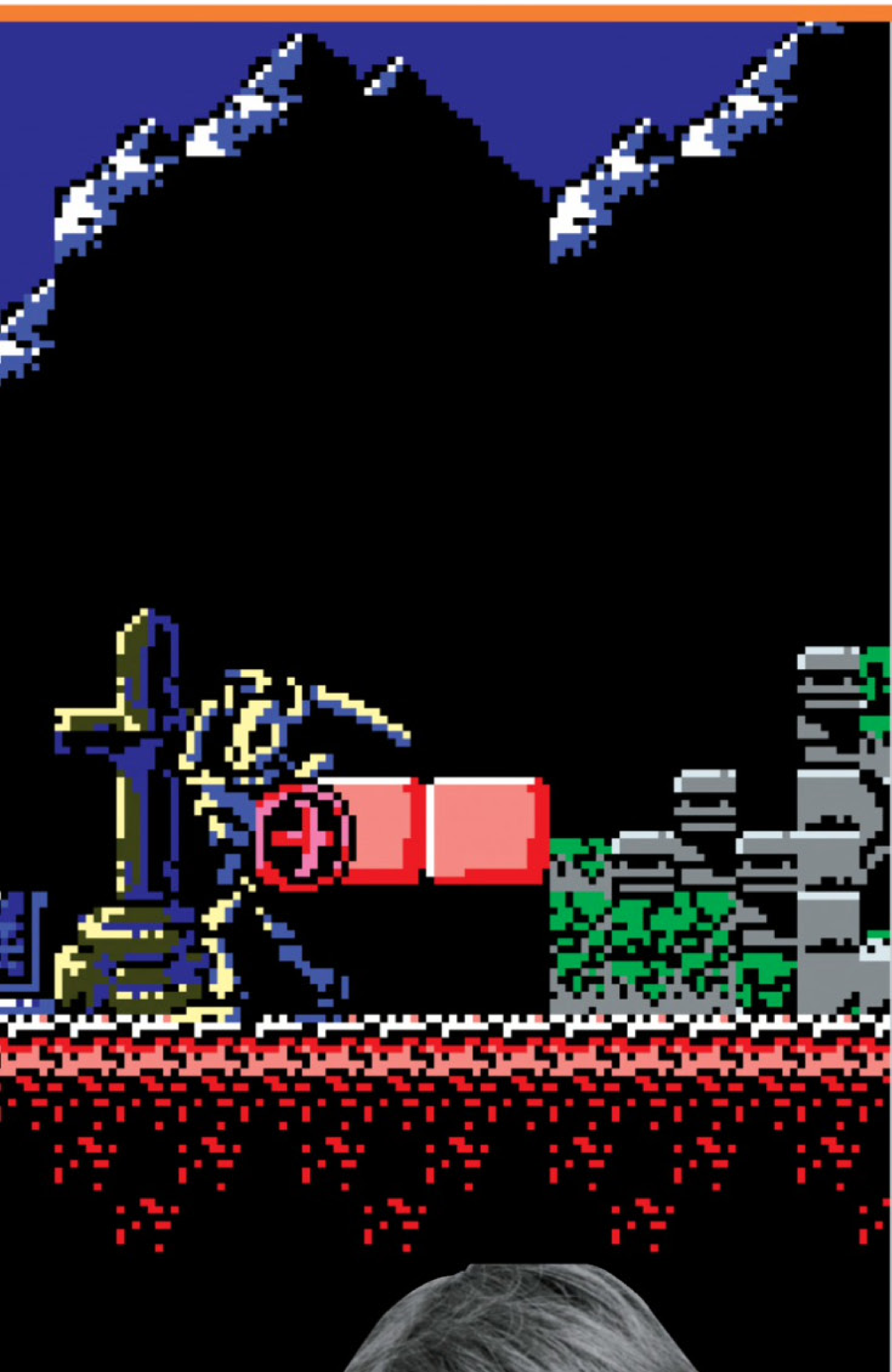
FEATURED





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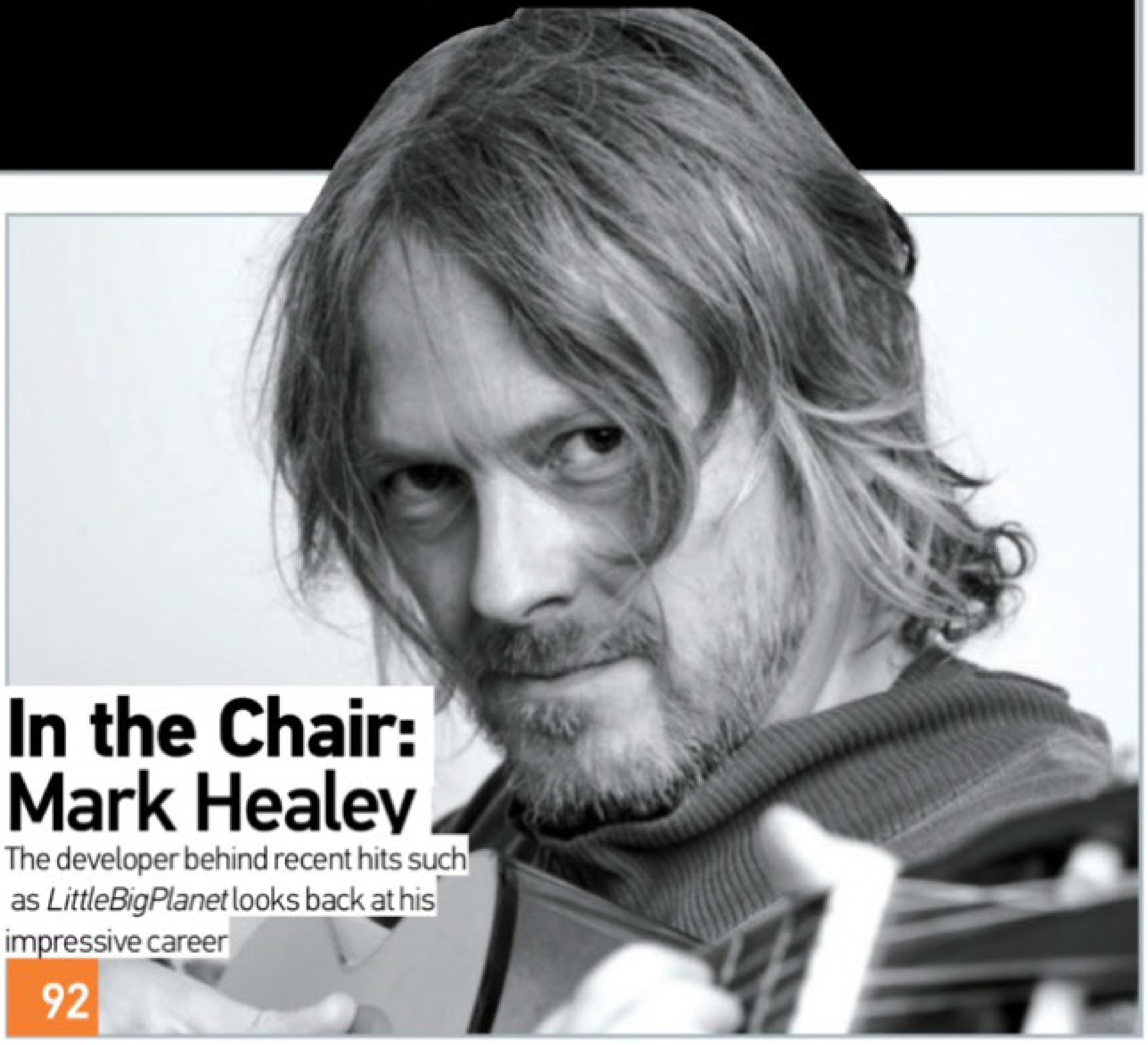






"Balancing the enemies in the game was definitely the most difficult thing to do"





REVIEWS

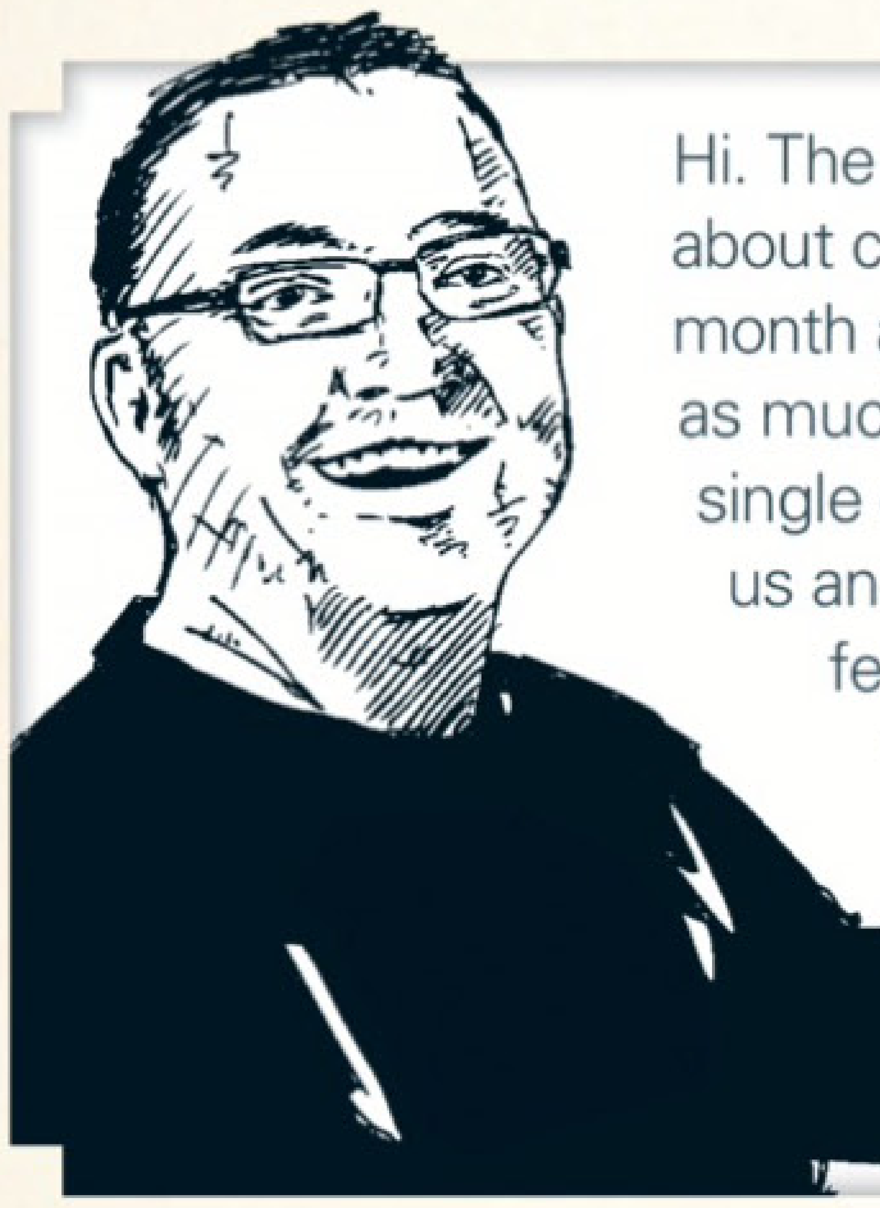


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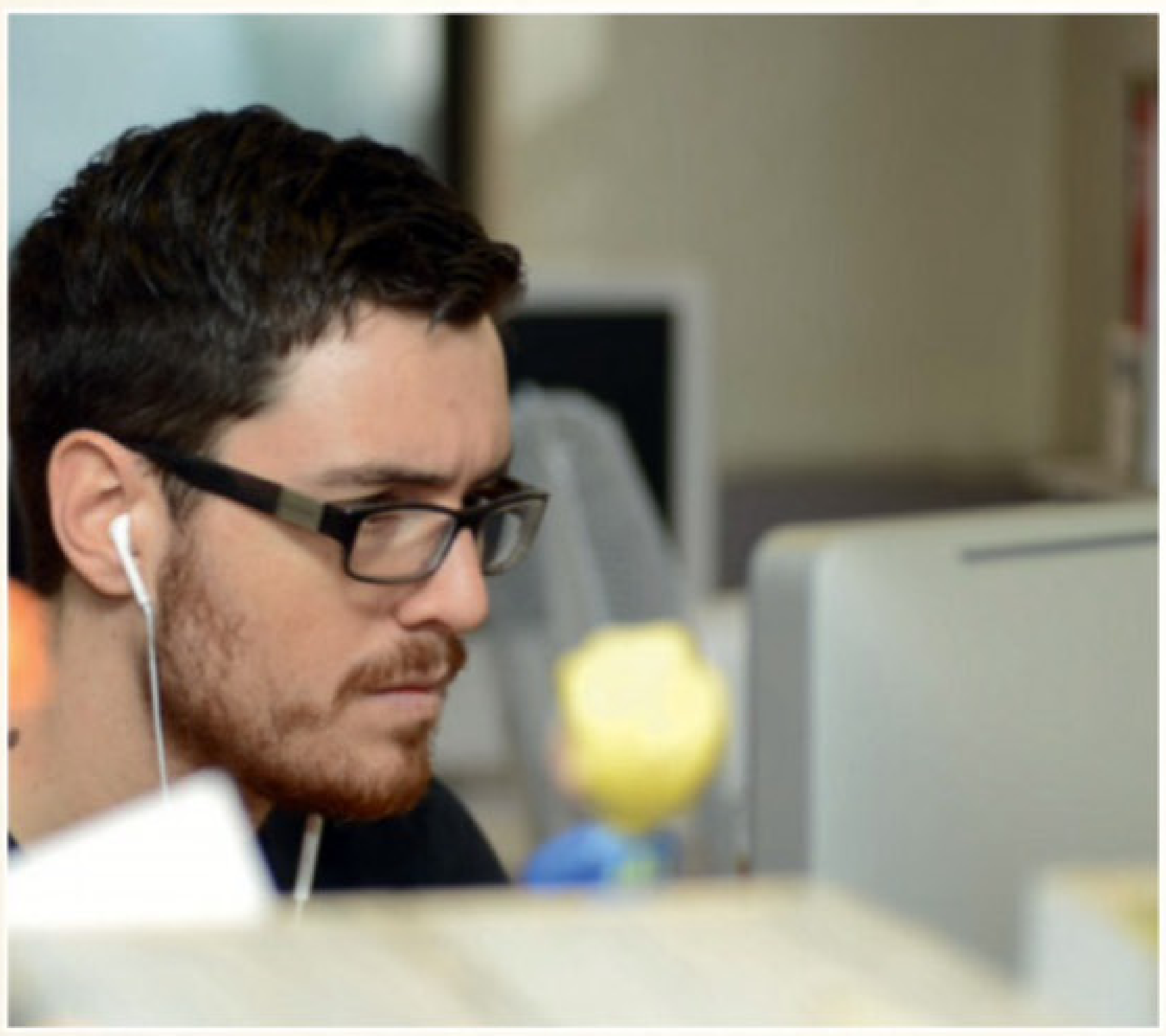
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Hi. The team is incredibly passionate about creating **Retro Gamer** each month and we hope you enjoy reading it as much as we enjoy creating it. Every single one of our readers is important to us and we would love to receive your feedback so that we can improve the magazine and make it better for every one of you.

Darran Jones
Editor







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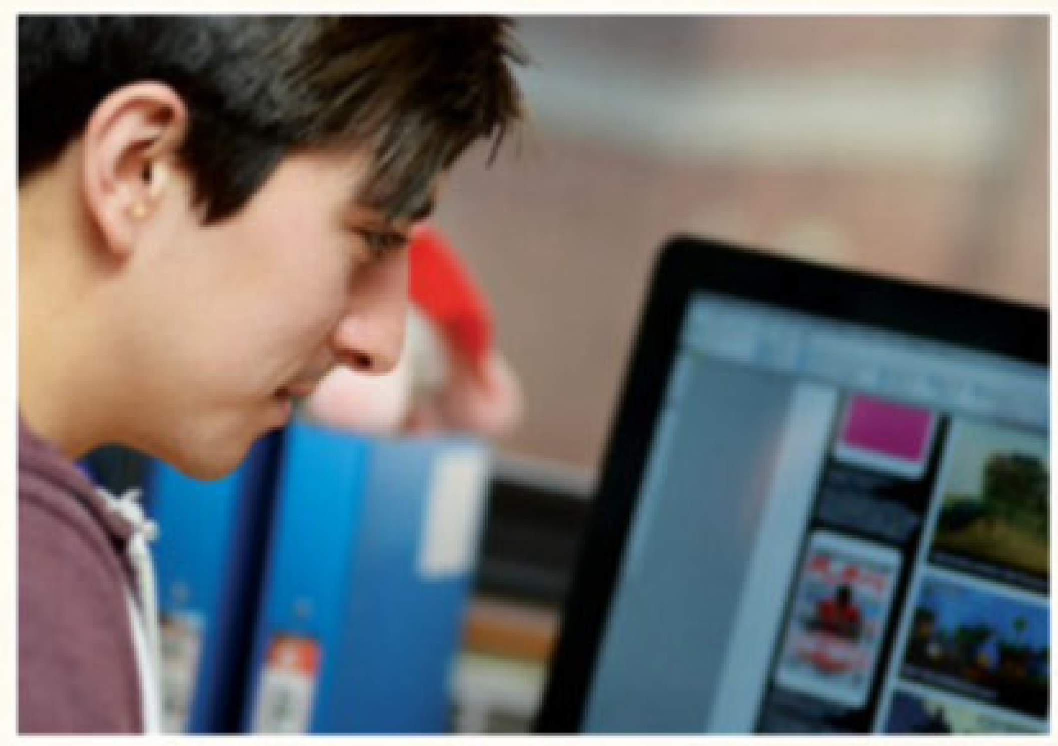


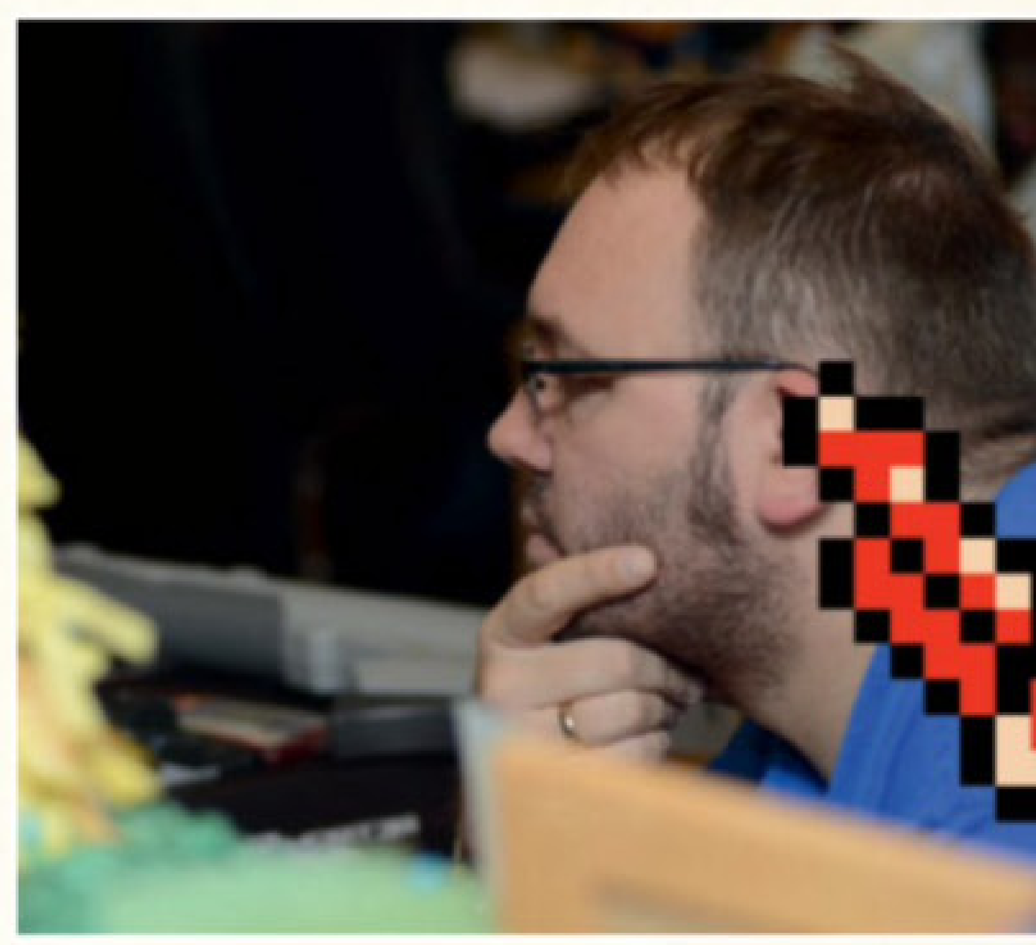
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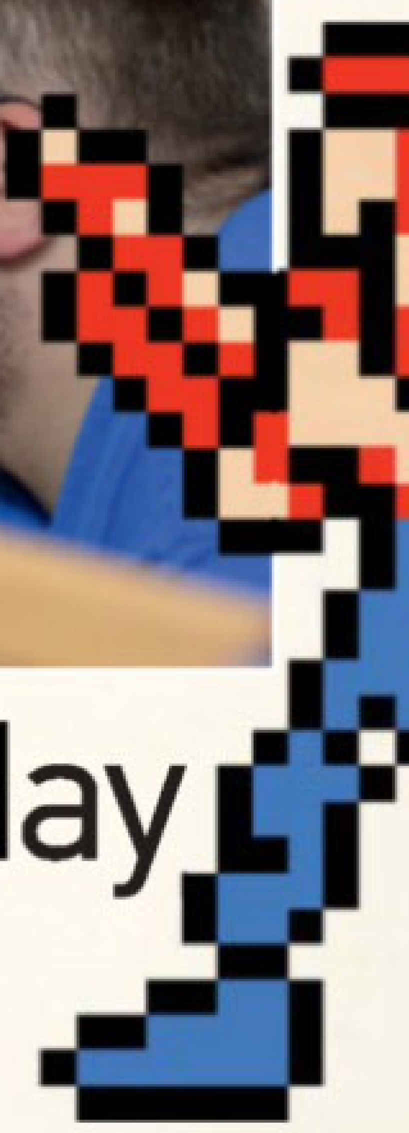


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» It's only a prototype at the moment, but the lack of buttons is already concerning some gamers about how accurate the Vega will be.

RETURN OF THE SPECTRUM

THE DEVELOPER OF THE SPECTRUM VEGA DISCUSSES ITS NEW SYSTEM

The Sinclair Spectrum Vega is making a lot of gamers very excited. After all, who wouldn't want to own an official Spectrum device that includes 1,000 games pre-loaded? Created by Retro Computers Ltd, the Vega is an official Sinclair product, an impressive deal in its own right. Coupled with the machine's rich legacy in the UK, it's not a surprise that the project smashed its £100,000 funding price in a mere matter of days.

The Vega promises to be plug-and-play and will feature a D-Pad and five buttons, as well as composite output. It's currently modelled on the original Spectrum. Chris Smith, the author of *The ZX Spectrum Ula: How To Design A Microcomputer*, is in charge of the Vega and is pleased to be creating an official Sinclair product. "It's pretty exciting really, but there is a big precedent to follow," he admits. "As it's a retro product, it had to maintain the familiar Sinclair styles of the Eighties so as to look and feel right."

One thing that doesn't feel right is the fact that a great many games aren't going to be easily playable due to a distinct lack of buttons. The likes of *Elite*, *The Hobbit* and *Skool Daze* (assuming rights are secured) will all suffer, even with the included virtual keyboard - which begs the question, why not just include a keyboard from the off?

"It was a balance between cost, functionality and form," explains Chris. "Most games can be played with a joystick alone, though often require a few additional keys. The Vega concept of a handheld gaming device is ideally suited to these types of games. Reproducing the ZX Spectrum keyboard on the Vega would have created an entirely different product, and one not suited to arcade games. This does leave text-based adventure games at a disadvantage, as an on-screen keyboard isn't an ideal control method, but we are working on novel text entry concepts and hope to provide a solution later."

Creating a Spectrum without a traditional keyboard isn't the only technical challenge Chris and his team has faced… "Cost is the deal breaker with a product of this type," he admits. "This is something Sinclair fought with in the Eighties, and we're continuing that today. Developing the low cost hardware for the Vega was difficult. We started with a custom chip design, but it was too expensive to tool up for fabrication unless we were producing hundreds of thousands of chips. So we decided to do more in software and less in hardware, and look for a commodity system-on-a-chip that would satisfy our requirements. This of course meant writing custom software for the chip, which also takes a long time."



» [ZX Spectrum] When we asked about the likelihood of Ultimate games on Vega Paul told us: "I cannot confirm on the games just yet, as we are still talking to a lot of people."

Despite these difficulties, Chris is confident in the Vega and isn't too surprised that there's still so much love for Sinclair's range of home computers. "It was the gameplay that made a game really enjoyable and addictive," he remarks, "not stupendous graphics and special effects because you couldn't do them. Gameplay was everything. Today, those games from the Eighties and Nineties are still as challenging and addictive as ever.

"Programming these 8-bit computers to get the most out of them is a real challenge, and people still get a lot of enjoyment and learn a great deal from pushing those machines to their limits. Programmers who cut their teeth on



these early machines have a deep understanding and respect for what's going on under the lid of a computer."

Despite the popularity of the new device, the included games are proving a sticking point for some. Initially, Retro Computers Ltd was going to simply give a percentage of each Vega's profits to a charity, which is great for the charity in question, but not so good for the original owners. This stance has since changed however with developers now being given a choice of receiving 1% or giving that 1% to a charity of their choice. Furthermore the company is promising that 10% of future sales will be shared between developers, while another 10% will go to charity. It's also reaching out to developers on its official site, although that does feel a little like shutting the gate after the horse has bolted.

Considering the sheer popularity of the Spectrum and its vast catalogue of great games it's odd that no games or developers were revealed when the campaign launched. Paul Andrews, Retro Computers Ltd's managing director explained the secrecy. "We did not want to talk to developers prior to announcing what we were doing to the world, for all the obvious reasons: that it would have undoubtedly have leaked out, and we would have lost the impact which we clearly did have in the end with the announcement. It was nothing sinister, just we did not want to go live until the day we did."

We'd argue that being able to reveal what games were actually available would be an even better selling point, leading to more sales, but it appears to have made little difference to the 2,000 odd people who have already backed the Vega.

The Vega's physical limitations certainly appear to be holding it back and we're still unsure how quickly rights for key games will be sorted but there's no denying that the ability to own an official Spectrum product with 1,000 legally licensed games appeals very strongly to us. Paul has revealed that the complete list of games will be announced shortly before the first devices are due to ship. Here's hoping that they live up to everyone's expectations. *

"Despite the popularity of the new device, the included games are proving to be a sticking point for some"



It's still unclear what crucial games will be included







THE GREATEST GAMES EVER

» Retro Gamer needs your help to find gaming's masterpieces

■ It's been a decade since the magazine first launched and readers may remember a poll that charted the best 100 games of all time. We felt that enough time has passed to look back at the last decade of gaming and discover if opinions have changed at all over the past ten years.

Do you still feel *Elite* is the best game you've ever played? Are you a massive fan of *R-Type* and *Double Dragon* or do you feel like recent classics such as *The Last Of Us* and *Grand Theft Auto V* should be celebrated? Perhaps *The Sims* is the pinnacle of your gaming career, or maybe it all went downhill after you discovered *The Secret Of Monkey Island* and *Sensible World Of Soccer*? Whatever you feel the best games are we want your voice to be heard, this is your magazine after all.

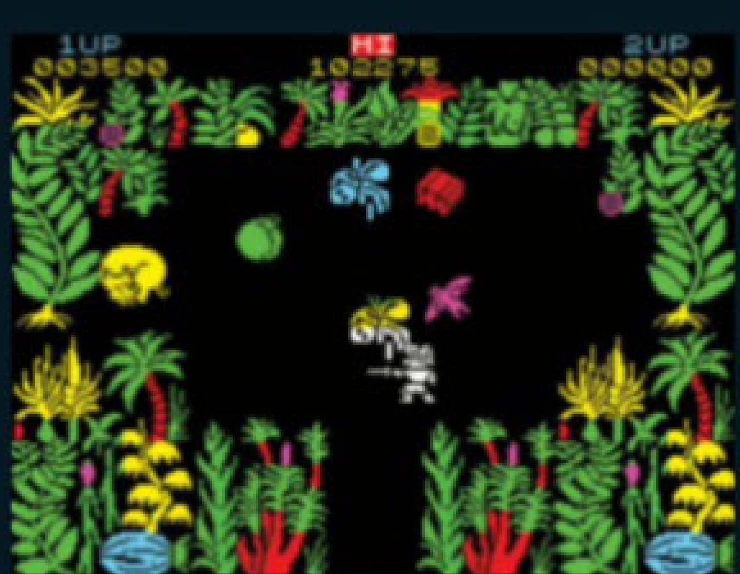
To join in simply send an email to **retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk** titled Greatest Games Ever. Send us your top ten personal choices and we'll do the rest. And if you want to tell us why these games made your list then let us know, we'd love to hear from you.

GAME ON

» The developers that need to be on board

■ **Ultimate Play The Game**

For many, the games of Ultimate define the Spectrum more than any other developer so we're really hoping that hits such as *Knightlore*, *Sabre Wulf* and *Jetpac* were some of the first games to be secured. To us, a Spectrum that can't play Ultimate games isn't a Spectrum at all.



■ **Ocean Software**

Ocean was the king of arcade conversions and movie licences, so we'd love to see its products available on the Vega. It would be amazing to have access to *RoboCop*, *The Untouchables* and *Gryzor*, along with many other classics, but we'd imagine that the film and arcade rights could be difficult to secure.



■ **Hewson Consultants**

Yes, you could make the argument that Hewson games always looked better on the C64, but its Spectrum conversions were still pretty tasty and played extremely well. They also hit the "arcade" criteria that Chris mentions, meaning we could potentially get to play greats such as *Uridium*, *Cybernoid* and *Exolon*.





» Chris Smith is no stranger to the Sinclair range of home computers and is pleased to be working on a new official product.



REVENGE OF THE SMURFS

AMIGA CODER RECEIVES 'CEASE AND DESIST' FROM STUDIO PEYO

In late December of last year, Amiga coder, Mikael Persson released a new *Smurfs* game. "The only *Smurfs* game that exists for the Amiga is a very old shooter, so I thought it would be nice to have something better than that," he explains. "It's not because I like Smurfs. I hate them!"

The resentment is likely to continue because within a few short weeks of the game being made available to download for free, Persson received a 'cease and desist' letter from Studio Peyo, with a request for 2000 euros to cover court costs. Needless to say the news has hit Persson hard.

"[I feel] very sad," he tells us. "I will never forget this. Why do they care about a game created for a computer that died 20 years ago? I doubt they know what an Amiga even is! I first thought this was some kind of a bad joke. So I ignored the first e-mails from them, but after a week they sent me papers to my home address. It was then I realised that this was for real, and I have actually never heard of anyone who has been sued for a homebrew game before. Not even those who are making games using famous characters and stuff."

Persson has now removed the game from his website and has also removed *Super Ted: The Search For Spot* (which we reviewed last issue). He's also revealed that he's unlikely to code anything in the future. "[I wanted] to bring a lot of new fun titles for my all time favorite machine, but I do not want to take the risk of being sued again."



» [Amiga] We're not sure how this Disney crossover would go down with Studio Peyo…



» [Amiga] Mikael won't be making any new Amiga games based on licences.

BOY WONDER

A SEGA CLASSIC INSPIRES A QUEST FOR BOOZE

The *Wonder Boy* franchise has been entertaining gamers for nearly 30 years. It now looks like a spiritual successor is on the way courtesy of *Wonder Boy*'s original creator, Ryuichi Nishizawa.

Monster Boy And The Wizard Of Booze is due out later this year courtesy of Game Atelier and FDG Entertainment. The teaser webpage and existing screenshots suggest it will share elements with *Wonder Boy III: The Dragon's Trap*. More news as and when we get it.



» They're only work in progress, but the *Wonder Boy* style seems to have been nailed.

RETURN TO BALDUR'S GATE

BEAMDOG SOFTWARE ARE MAKING A NEW D&D GAME

For the last few years Beamdog Software has been working tirelessly on updating *Baldur's Gate I* and *II* for a new generation of gamers. It would appear that all the hard work has paid off, because the team recently revealed that it's currently working on a brand new *Baldur's Gate* game.

What's interesting, however, is that this isn't *Baldur's Gate III*, but a spin-off game that will bridge the gap between the two previous releases. The new game is currently known only as *Adventure Y*, but it's already sounding like an interesting addition to the series.

Adventure Y will use the Infinity Engine that has powered both enhanced editions of *Baldur's Gate*, making it instantly familiar to fans of the series. It's unclear what systems it will release on, or even when the release will be, but we would hazard a guess that PC, Mac and tablets releases seem extremely likely. Beamdog announced another adventure game at the same time, called *Adventure Z*, but it's unlikely that it will be part of *Dungeons & Dragons*. Expect more news and a review later in the year.

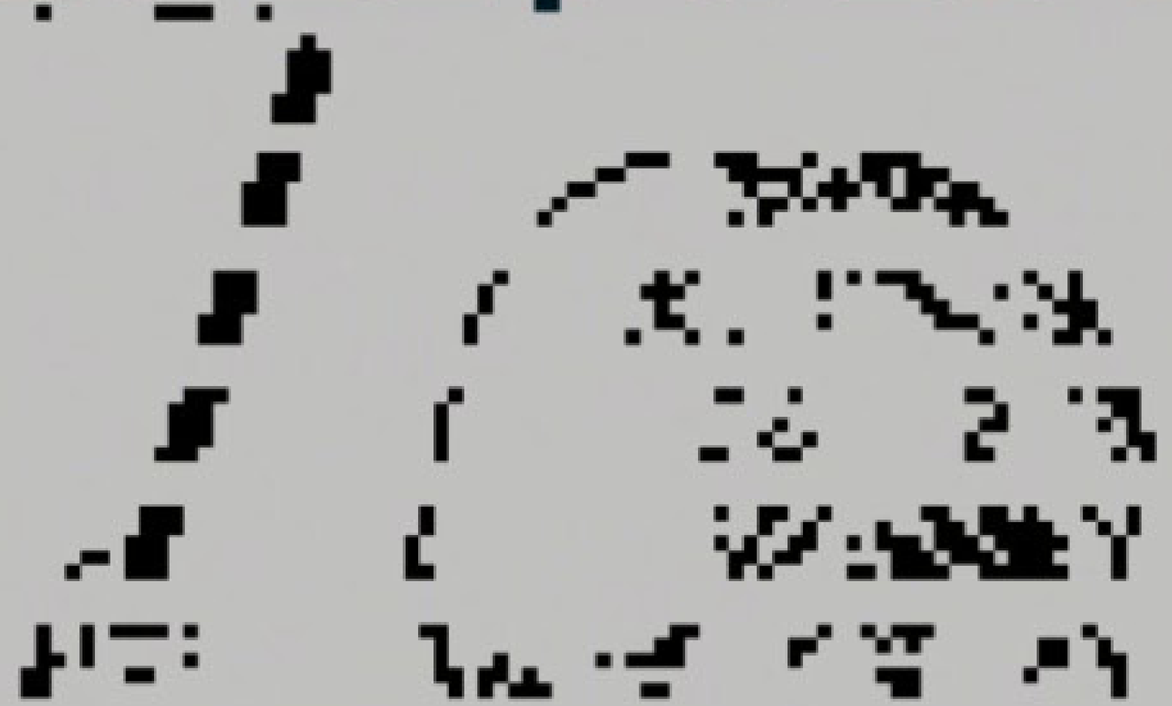


» [PC] There are no screens yet, but the engine used means *Adventure Y* will look very similar to *Baldur's Gate: Enhanced Edition*.

Here's my bio... Paul Davies

In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *C&VG*. I led the *C&VG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.

Wires, waiting and wotnot



It's 2015 and this is the future that my 15-year-old self once tried to imagine. I've got TV on my phone and there's a hover board in development. However, the simple act of trying to play a videogame can still be a pain in the arse.

When you sit down to think about why games are so adorable, part of the attraction for old timers like me must surely be that the experience has never been truly perfect. I mean, never ever. Actually I will say that the ZX81 and ZX Spectrum home computers kind of were perfect for what they were. So maybe the real issue here is my levels of expectation after those golden eras being set sky high.

For 30+ years there have been weird and niggling obstacles in the way of our enjoyment, or rather the instant access to entertainment we expect compared to switching on the TV. But because the images on screen and the occupation of your hands when, say, *Jet-Pac* finally loaded was so mind-blowing the faff of waiting for a well worn cassette tape to fulfil its destiny was perhaps forgivable.

With the Game Boy I was constantly trying to find a decent light source that wasn't the sun (because there was rarely any sun in Rochdale after 1976), and even then I was fiddling with the contrast wheel to see a discernible image. No pain no gain. I was getting used to this by now though.

On a related note, the business of playing versus games between countless iterations of Game Boy hardware, each requiring a different cable or adaptor, and recognising the AC adaptors instantly by sight has to be one of the most consistent sources of stress throughout my twenties.

We've wasted years of our lives accumulated from the loading times of PlayStation, Saturn, Dreamcast and Xbox. This didn't improve at all with PS2, PS3 and Xbox 360. It's still crap for PS4 and Xbox One – even when playing off digitally downloaded versions (how old-fashioned is that going to sound soon too eh). There are always these hold-ups, at which you can only grimace and bear it.

I love it though, the fact that there has always been the rough with the smooth, the things to worry about while the payoffs can be so great. It's like one huge experimental journey devised by Doctor Emmet Brown or Egon Spendler. This is crazy but it just might work.

So when PSN goes down or *The Master Chief Collection* just doesn't work because sights are set too high, or basically not well enough understood or out of control, this always reminds me that games continue to be a work in progress, a kid that keeps making mistakes, or an elderly relative who's now out of their mind – but kind of knows it too.

I think whenever, if ever, gaming becomes a straightforward exercise and everything is perfect, part of the reason I love the whole experience will be gone forever. Long live the heartaches in exchange for the heady thrills and may mankind never truly acquire the knack of the flawless videogame.

Our work is never done. The super meter is never full. The experience points required to attain the next Level Up are almost too many to achieve in our lifetime or the next. ✱

Tape Loader

To cancel – press BREAK twice

What do you think?

Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk www.retrogamer.net/forum

DISCUSS

Thoughts on handheld gaming

Forum
www.retrogamer.net/forum

■ I play handheld consoles as much as home consoles. If the next game I'm interested in just happens to be handheld then so be it. **Megamixer**

■ I absolutely love the PlayStation Vita and have every UK release so far along with nearly all the US limited editions. **Morkin**

■ I wouldn't say that I prefer handhelds over console gaming as I think they are equal to the enjoyment that I get out of them. **dste**

■ I have a half decent collection of Nintendo handhelds – Game Boy Color, Advance, SP, DS, DS XL – but never really spent that much time using them to be honest. **WoodyCG**

■ I keep buying handhelds because I love the idea of them. I always tell myself I can play them on journeys and on holidays. Then they just get left and I can never be bothered to play on them. **RodimusPrime**

■ Me + Game Boy + *Tetris* = very happy retro gamer. **Mire Mare**

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■ It is and always will be the Atari Lynx. So ahead of its time… Game Boy Advance comes second. **@thefunkygamer**

■ Loved my Game Boy when I was young. So many magical worlds, expressed via so little. **@Clock_punk**

■ After moving to a smaller apartment I started collecting handhelds and out of all of them the GBA has the best game library **@ChristianCarley**

■ Love handheld gaming, I just don't have time for it. I like the PS Vita but my hands are too big to enjoy it. **@VideogameNuwb**

■ The original Game Boy is my favourite. When the Game Boy was released it allowed a whole generation to play games without waiting for the communal TV to be available. **@TetrisDroid**

■ Handheld gaming has always mirrored console gaming. That was the goal. Recreate home on the go. **@Rekka_kun**

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■ I prefer consoles. The small screens of handhelds bother me. **Réne Rivers**

■ I play handhelds. Especially for JRPGs they're great. Kick back in the bed with. **Christoffer Ekelund**

■ It depends on the game. Some games, such as *Tetris*, lend themselves better to handheld gaming. **Martin Harder**

■ Handheld gaming for me only started with the PSP and continued with the Vita. **Mike Johnson**

■ Nothing like a bit of *Temple Run* on the loo. I guess most handheld gaming today is done on mobile phones. **John Christian Lønningdal**

■ I use an Android tablet. It's really an all in one solution that works great for me. **DM Loughrey**

■ As long as Nintendo are putting games on their own consoles smart phone gaming will never be able to compete in terms of quality. **Thomas Marshall**





What We Think

■ I've always had an affinity for handheld gaming. I love the portability and the creativity that often comes with them. We only have one main TV in the house, which means if I want to do some gaming, I'll typically have to resort to a handheld. As a result my PS Vita, 3DS and Game Boy Micro are always getting plenty of use.

the vault

THE COOL RETRO STUFF THAT WE'VE HAD OUR EYE ON THIS MONTH

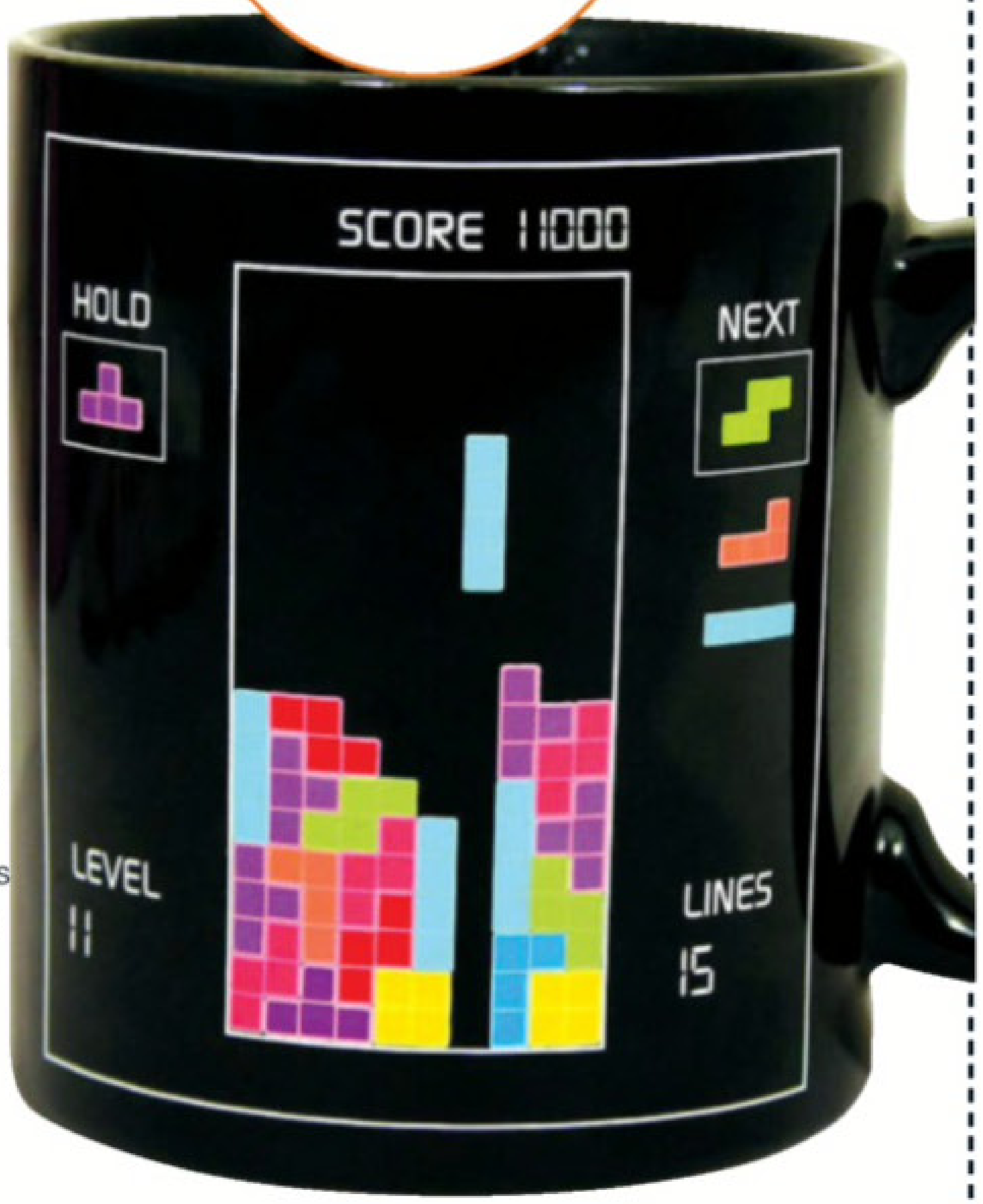
PICK OF THE MONTH



Tetris Heat Change Mug

We rather like this heat change mug from Paladone. Pour a cold drink into it and you'll be treated to the early stages of a game of *Tetris*. Fill it with a hot beverage, however, and it transforms into a formidable wall of blocks with the player about to score a Tetris. Naturally, we always prefer a hot drink. We've had a few of these mugs in the past, but this is one of the best, both in terms of its graphics and the quality of the actual mug. Don't put it in the dishwasher though – otherwise you'll learn the hard way. Like Darran did.

Price: £7.99
From: www.amazon.co.uk





Keep Calm And Invade T-Shirt

Space Invaders merchandise is everywhere, adorning everything from moneyboxes to rubbers. Rather than get bored of it, we're always looking for the next cool item instead and we believe we've found it in this rather natty official merchandise. It takes an overused popular slogan, but marries it to the coolness of Taito's game. The end result is a rather impressive and cool T-shirt that should please retro fans and hipsters alike.

Price: £14.99
From: www.funstock.co.uk

Mega Drive Console Notebook

Want to be able to doodle in style whilst showing your allegiance to Sega's Mega Drive? Then we suggest you grab this rather excellent little pad that will enable you to look cool while you are scribbling in its margins. Styled to look like Sega's most successful console, this 96-page book should last you a good while. If you are not a fan of the Mega Drive, then why not try a Game Gear, Dreamcast or Saturn version instead.

Price: £7.99
From: www.funstock.co.uk



NES Classic Controller Reversible Messenger Bag

Messenger bags are all the rage at the moment, so why not get one that's styled around one of gaming's most iconic controllers? Designed to look like a giant NES pad, it comes with a reversible flap, but we greatly prefer the single graphic instead of the smaller images. It's roomy too, meaning you'll be able to cram a fair amount of tat in there.
Price: £24.99 **From:** www.funstock.co.uk

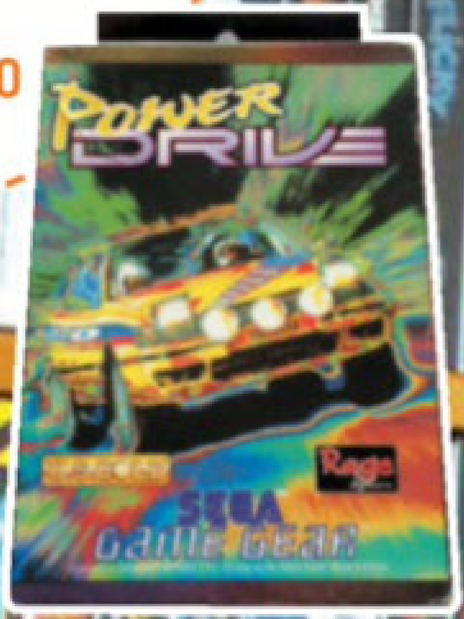




Pac-Man Fridge Magnets

Turn your fridge into a living arcade screen with these high quality official fridge magnets. Although there's only one version of *Pac-Man*, you get plenty of the ghosts, including their vulnerable forms, meaning you can replicate the thrills and spills of the classic original arcade game with very little effort.

Price: £5.00
From: www.amazon.co.uk



POWER DRIVE (SEGA GAME GEAR)

"This is considered the holy grail of Game Gear games and there are less than ten copies known to exist. The last four on eBay have all gone for over £1,000."

PAID: £7.00



RETRON 5

"I know lots of people frown upon emulation but it is an easiest way to get retro onto a big screen with minimal effort."

PAID: £150

THE FAERY TALE ADVENTURE (SEGA MEGA DRIVE)

"I am a big RPG fan and this game was my introduction to the genre. The game came with a small map and I remember getting it blown up to A3 which made navigating the game much easier."

PAID: £1



MUSIC (SG-1000)

"This isn't a game as such but an early music production program. It's totally mint with all its inserts and the steel keyboard overlay."

PAID: €15



MAME MACHINE

"I grew up in the arcades and want to show my children all the games I played. I bought them a machine for Christmas."

PAID: £1100

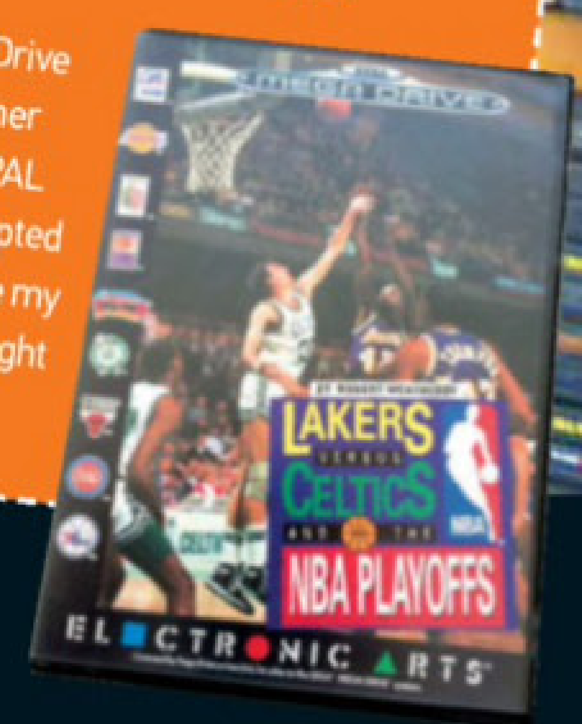


JEWEL IN THE CROWN

THAT PIECE YOU CAN'T BE WITHOUT

LAKERS VERSUS CELTICS AND THE NBA PLAYOFFS

■ "I was one game away from a full Mega Drive set, until in 2011 Leigh Hills [Collectors Corner **Retro Gamer 134**] posted a picture of the PAL version of this game which was widely accepted to be NTSC only. I thought I'd never complete my collection due to its rarity, but eventually bought it out of a bundle on eBay for £750."



Collectors corner

Readers take us through the retro keyhole



BIO

NAME: Russell Piper

ESTIMATED VALUE: £55,000

MOST EVER SPENT: £750 on Blue Box World Championship Soccer 2 and Lakers Versus Celtics And The NBA Playoffs

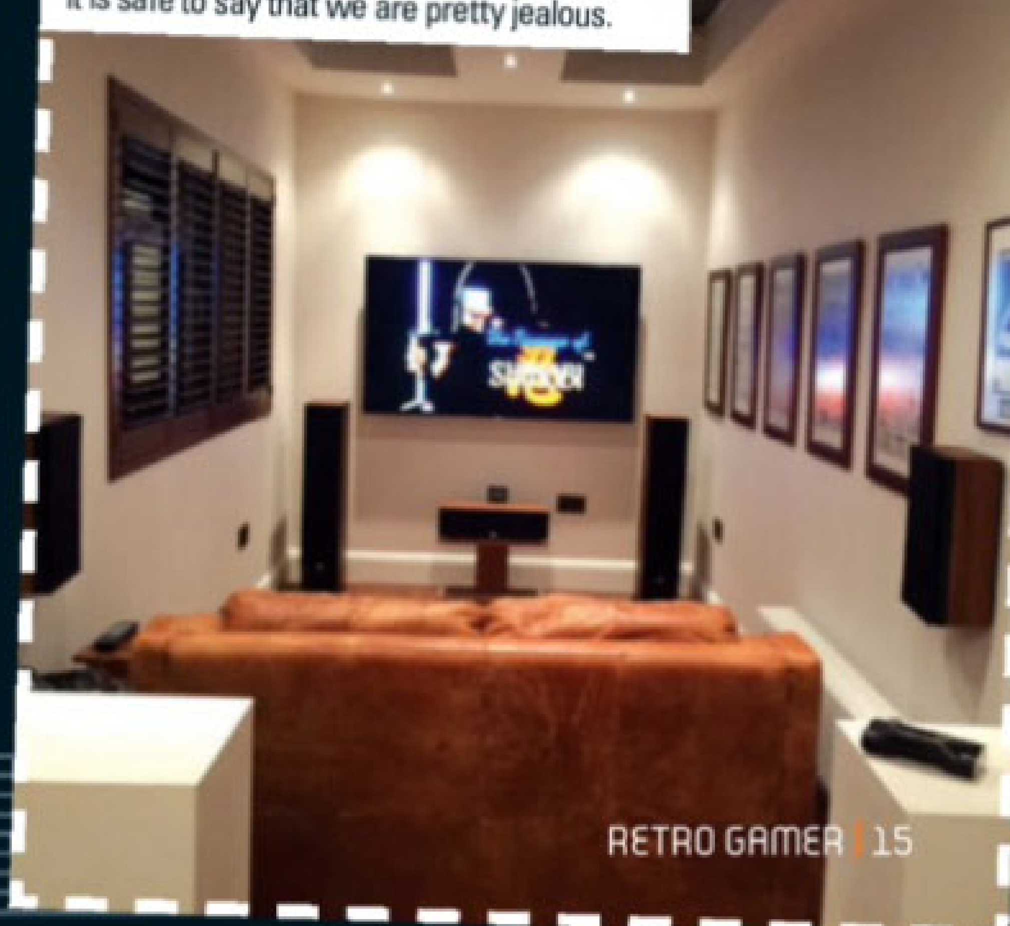
FAVOURITE CONSOLE: Sega Mega Drive

We think it is quite safe to say that Russell is a Sega nut, as he owns complete collections for every one of its consoles. Yes, that's every Master System game; every Mega Drive game; every Mega-CD game; every Game Gear game, and every Saturn and Dreamcast game. "I had Sega consoles as a kid when everyone else I knew had Nintendo," he tells us, "and I always root for the underdog." Russell's collection began in 2003 when he started a company for importing pet toys. While selling his products at car boot sales he would often notice the stalls around him laden with Sega Mega Drive games.

Having collected every PAL game for the Mega Drive, Russell decided to focus his collecting on the famous developer and publisher. "It went Mega Drive, Mega-CD, 32X, Master System, Saturn, Dreamcast, and then everything else PAL Sega," he says proudly. His efforts were not without pitfalls, though, as he explains, "*Lakers Versus Celtics* appeared on all of the early Mega Drive collecting tick lists but nobody had ever seen a complete one, and many assume it was the common NTSC version that had been added by accident to the PAL list. I was one game away from a complete Mega Drive set when a member on RetroCollect posted a picture of a copy. I offered the owner a large amount of money, but he didn't want to sell. I stopped collecting for about a year until someone gave me a heads up of a copy and I made the seller a offer, he agreed!"

But we save the big question for last – having completed his Sega collection, is Russell tempted to collect for another manufacturer in order to feed his habit? "Since I have completed my sega set I have had no withdrawl symptoms," he says, "I remember working overtime at work and instead of thinking of the pounds per hour, I converted it into games per hour. I haven't been tempted to start collecting Nintendo games or go on an Atari binge buy."

» Russell has something of a Sega cinema and it is safe to say that we are pretty jealous.



a moment with...



Paul Rose

Paul "Mr Biffo" Rose discusses the return of Digitizer



» Digitiser 2000 has proven really popular since its return in December last year.

How did you find the original transition to writing for TV?
It was a gradual thing – I was already writing TV stuff for years before I chose to leave Digi, so I had time to get used to it. When it looked as if I could make a living out of it, that's when I threw in the towel. The hardest adjustment was losing a regular monthly wage. Now, ironically, I'm taking a step back towards what I used to do. And it feels right.

Why have you decided to return to the world of videogames?
I am still a gamer and I always will be one. Too often in recent years I have played a game or disagreed with a review, and wanted to have a platform to tell people! Plus it is nice to have an outlet for the nonsense that swirls in my brain. For a long time I never thought I would return, but late last year I finally felt ready to come back. I had been gone long enough, and my reasons for leaving are water under the bridge now.

Why have you set up Digitiser 2000?
I miss writing about games. I miss writing stuff that isn't scripts. I miss writing with the sort of stupidity and freedom that only Digi allows, and not having a million notes, or writing ten drafts of something. I set it up to have some fun, but then people started asking for it to become permanent. I would love it if it was.

What is it like having fun with characters like Gossi The Dog again, after all this time?
It's incredibly liberating. It's weird how easy it has been to slip into that Digi style again. Probably because that's my natural writing style now that I think about it. I've loved working in TV and films, but it's always a collaboration, and it has meant I've had to compromise what I feel I do best. Digi 2000 lets me scratch away at that itch with a wire brush.

How do you think games journalism has changed since Digitiser first closed down?
It has changed a lot. I have had many journos tell me that Digi was an influence, but if I am honest I only really see that coming through in podcasts or personal blogs. I see the *Edge* influence much more. Games writing has become increasingly intellectual, and lost some of its sense of fun.

Have you decided on a funding scheme for Digitiser 2000 yet?
Well, we're trying to go the crowd-funded route with Patreon – which is going pretty well. But to bring Digi back full time we need to really get the word out there, and raise some serious funds. I can't just throw in my day job (not that I necessarily want to yet). We're working on a range of Digi merch, but it'd be great to have someone with real resources backing us. At the moment, it's just me and my girlfriend running the site. It's rewarding on all kinds of levels, but we're already finding ourselves pretty stretched.

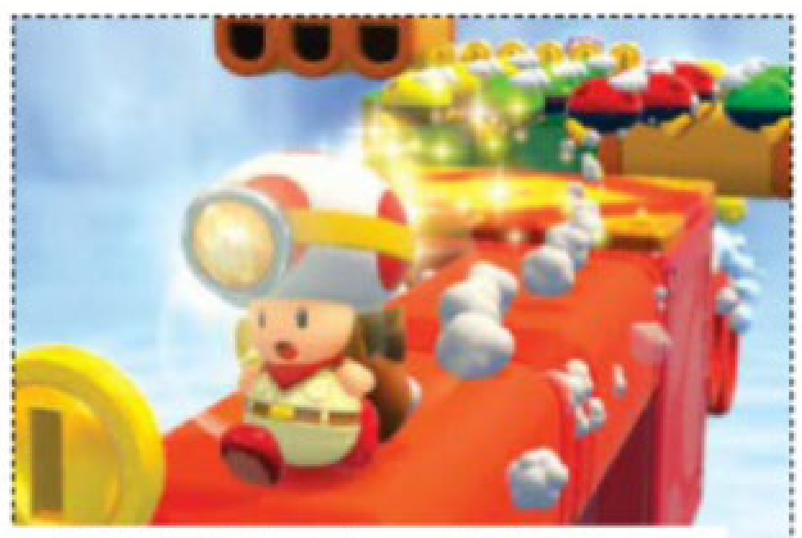
Have you been pleased with the reception that Digitiser 2000 has received?
I've been blown away. It's utterly humbling that so many people have such affection for it – and that they're willing to help pay for it, to ensure they get a regular dose. I can't wrap my head around it.

Would you be interested in writing scripts for videogames? You certainly have the credentials.
I would love to! I think games – in one form or another – are going to be the future of storytelling. *



» [Xbox] Paul was also behind the story for the rather enjoyable *Future Tactics: Uprising*.

> "I miss writing with the sort of stupidity and freedom that only Digi allows. I set it up to have fun"
> Paul "Mr Biffo" Rose



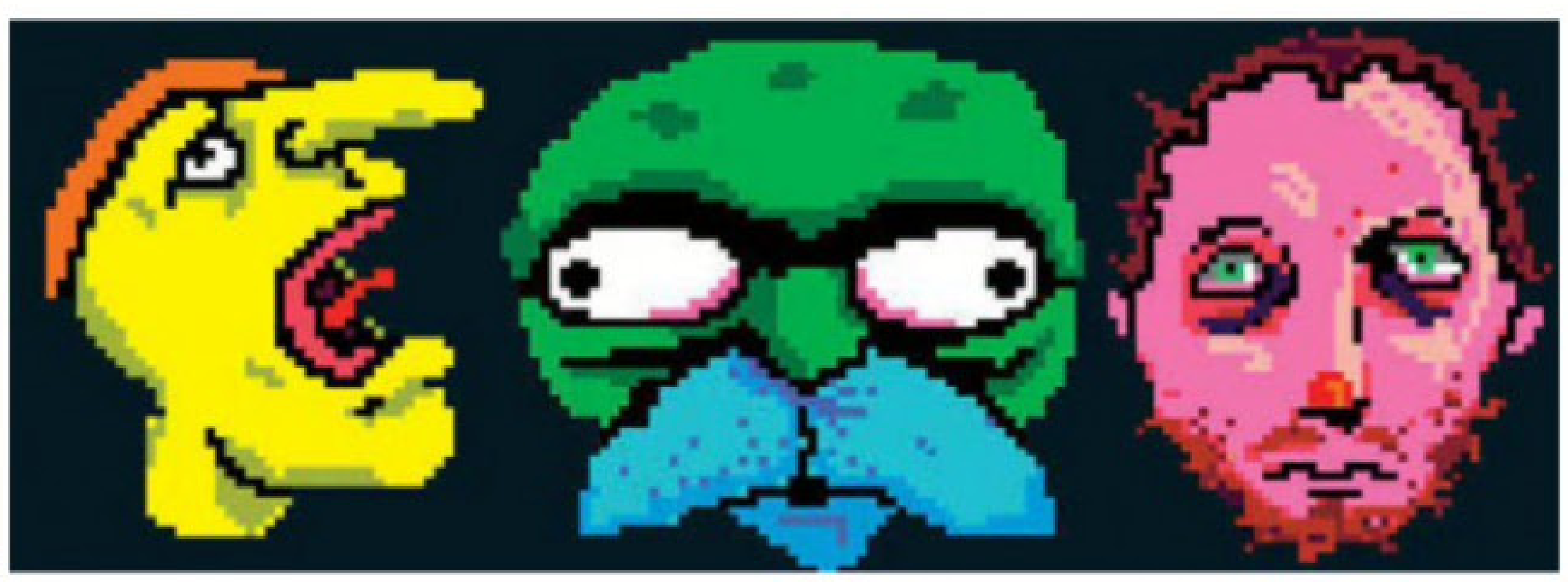
» [Wii U] In addition to the usual irrelevant humour, Digitiser 2000 is also reviewing new games.



» Paul wrote the screenplay for *Pudsy The Dog The Movie*.



» One of the old fake adverts that Paul used to use on Digitiser.



» A selection of the crazy characters found in Digitiser 2000. Which ones are your favourites?

BACK TO THE NINETIES



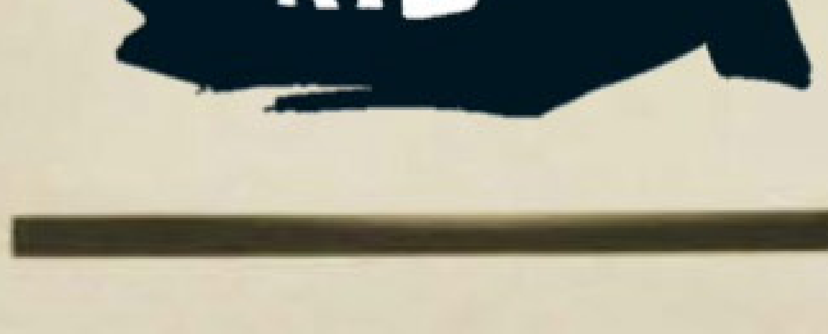
» [PlayStation] Harry is back encountering rope swings and scorpions all in glorious 3D. Plays well too.



» [Nintendo 64] The classic coin-op gets a makeover. Looks fine but gameplay doesn't better the original.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM FEBRUARY 1998

FEBRUARY 1998 – Aloha to Klonoa, Solid Snake creeps back, The Sentinel returns, it all kicks off with Match Day 3, Robotron goes 3D, and welcome to the jungle for Pitfall 3D. Richard Burton steps on a scorpion…



After its release in Japan and North America, the European release of Namco's side-scrolling platformer game *Klonoa: Door To Phantomile* was due for the PlayStation.

Despite the game being daubed in cutesy appeal with a cuddly main character, Klonoa, alongside colourful graphics, and a sickly back story about dreams powering the city Phantomile, you could be forgiven for thinking this was aimed at younger gamers.

The game itself was precisely produced with 12 testing levels and it was anything but a cakewalk, with some difficult bosses to defeat and puzzle elements that were equally as daunting. There were complaints focussed on the not-quite 3D camera perspective making jumping difficult to judge, and the relatively short length of the game, however, this did not distract from what was an accomplished title.

Konami had good news regarding its keenly anticipated *Metal Gear Solid* game for the PlayStation. It had been well over ten years since the original MSX2 releases had introduced us to Solid Snake. This time around, Snake had more nuclear problems to fix with an elite terrorist group threatening to launch untraceable warheads while holding some high-profile hostages.

The gameplay style stayed true to its predecessor games but *Metal Gear Solid* stepped up its graphics with a 3D approach, jumping between first and third-person perspective as and when it was required in gameplay. Cinematic cutscenes were interspersed in gameplay providing us with some Hollywood-style presentation.

You may have been laden with weapons and rations but the key to success was stealth. Utilising gadgets such as night vision goggles and creeping about without being caught was infinitely more rewarding than barrelling in with weapons ablaze.

Although *Metal Gear Solid* was still only half complete, it was already shaping up to be something quite special for Konami. When it did arrive in Europe it was established as a classic piece of gaming, not just in gameplay terms, but in defining the stealth genre,

THIS MONTH IN…

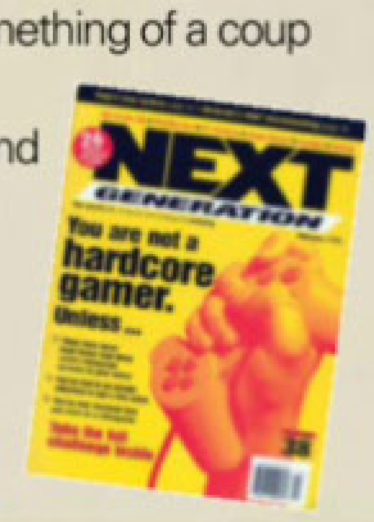
CU AMIGA MAGAZINE

Regular retro look-back column 'Techno Tragedies' focused on the computers that didn't hit the mark. This month the spotlight was shone firmly on the Jupiter Ace, the FORTH based ZX81 clone designed by two ex-Sinclair Research employees. Sadly, it was not from Jupiter and it defnitely was not very ace.



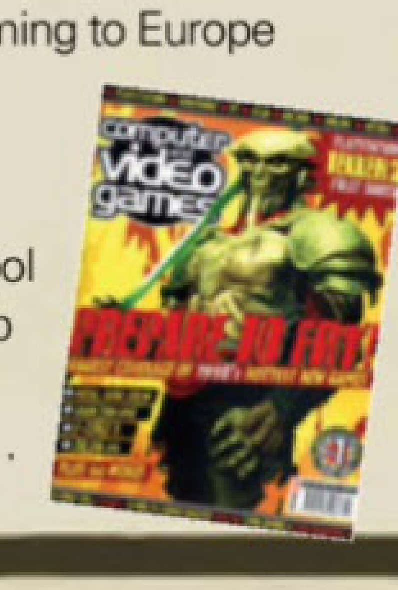
NEXT GENERATION

With Rare's stupidly popular James Bond GoldenEye 007 game currently all the rage on the Nintendo 64, *Next Generation* magazine pulled off something of a coup by getting the elusive founders of Rare, Tim and Chris Stamper, to give a meaty in-depth five page interview on the studio's past, present and future projects.



COMPUTER AND VIDEOGAMES

With Japan going bonkers for all things *Pokémon*, Nintendo revealed that the bandwagon is coming to Europe very soon. So Europe prepared for Pikachu images everywhere, Game Boy's and school kids literally knee deep in Pokémon trading cards. Gah… shinies…







FEBRUARY WORLD NEWS

3 February saw tragedy in Cavalese, Italy, when a low-flying American Marine Corps Prowler attack aircraft flew too low during test runs through the mountains, at approximately 500mph. One Prowler hit and severed a cable holding a gondola on the cable-car system. 20 tourists died when it plunged 250 feet to the ground.

6 February saw Austrian musician, Falco, prolific in his native land but most famous for his worldwide one hit wonder *Rock Me Amadeus*, killed in a car accident when a speeding bus collided with his vehicle. He was aged 40.

6 February saw the worldwide premiere of *Blues Brothers 2000*, the sequel to cult classic from 1980. Once again starring Dan Ackroyd as Elwood Blues (minus John Belushi who died in 1982), and the addition of John Goodman, they set off on another 'mission from God' to raise funds for the orphanage in the original film. Much hilarity ensued with cameos, great musical tracks, and the usual bonkers car chases/crashes culminating in a Battle Of The Bands finale. Not bad, but not good either…

28 February also saw the death of Irish comedian Dermot Morgan, who played Father Ted Crilly in the award winning comedy series, *Father Ted*. Morgan died of a heart attack just 24 hours after finishing filming on the third series of the show. He was 45.

Notable album releases in the music world for February included *Destiny's Child* (Destiny's Child), *Facing The Animal* (Yngwie Malmsteen), *Yield* (Pearl Jam) and *Bustin' + Dronin'* (Blur).

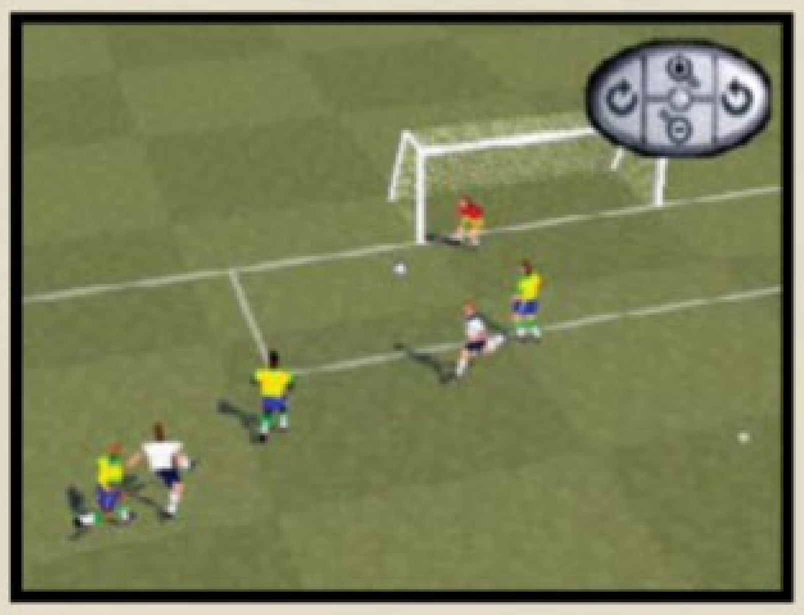
and as being one of the finest games released on the PlayStation.

In the mid Eighties, a unique strategy game called *The Sentinel* was released by Firebird. It had loads of levels, delightfully crafted graphics, and an excellent, albeit rather slow, first-person perspective… but that was the Eighties, this is February 1998. *The Sentinel*, err returned, in *Setinel Returns* for PC, and it looked more atmospheric and detailed than ever. In both *Sentinel* games you play as a Synthoid that must absorb its surroundings, such as trees and boulders, and use them to create a new body. The sole aim of the games was to achieve a greater height than the titular Sentinel, allowing you to absorb it and advance to the next stage.

While the level count dropped, the graphics were upgraded with a more foreboding feel and muted colour palette. The breathing rocks and fleshy looking Sentinels gave the game a survival horror tinge. Gameplay was similar to the original, and even with the 3D acceleration of your PC, the game was still ponderous work. *The Sentinel* was superb in the Eighties and *Sentinel Returns* was equally as superb, further highlighting that both games were indeed timeless classics.

Supposedly due for an imminent release was another retro gaming throwback in the form of *Match Day 3* for PC and PlayStation. In this instalment of the 8-bit footballing favourite, *Match Day 3* had reportedly run into technical and legal problems. The official release date came and went, and there was no response from the developers, Cranberry Source, which was programmer Jon Ritman's company. *Match Day 3* finally arrived six months later than anticipated but with a legally enforced name change. No longer *Match Day 3* it was renamed as the less nostalgic *Super Match Soccer*. Software house Acclaim published it rather than Ocean which may explain the cautiousness in using the *Match Day* name. When *Super Match Soccer* finally hit the shelves, it was disappointing with the majority of reviews not impressed with either the games mechanics or graphics.

» [PlayStation] What started out as *Match Day 3* morphed into Super Match Soccer and was not well liked.



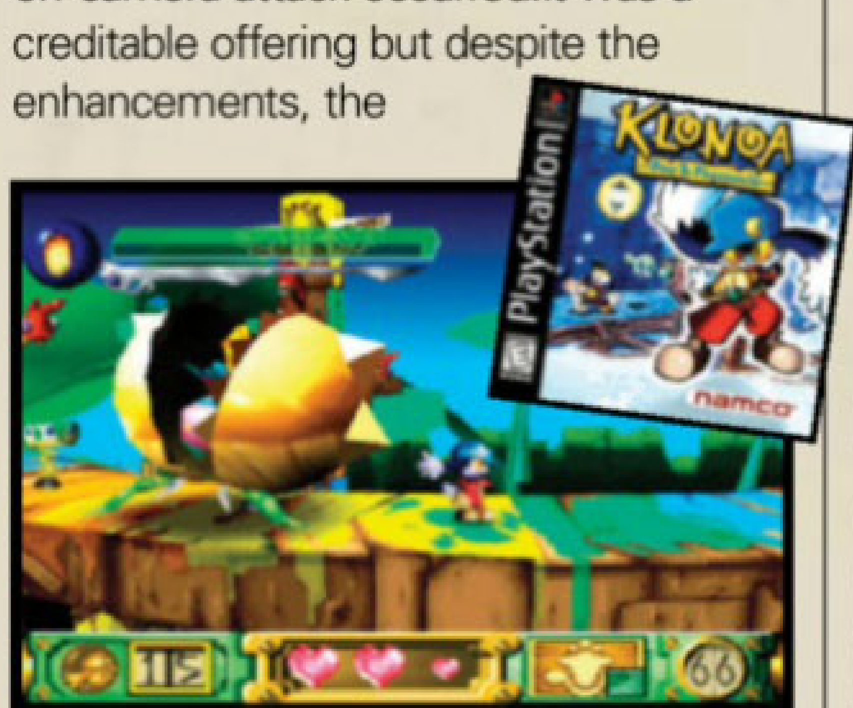
Another arcade coin-op and all time classic which received a makeover was *Robotron: 2084*. The fast-paced two dimensional multi-directional shoot-'em-up was about to enter the third dimension with a bag full of new weapons, multiple camera angles and some very smart looking graphics on the Nintendo 64. In *Robotron 64*, the gameplay and storyline were much the same as the original, with your superhuman character taking on robots in relentless waves of attacks. While the 3D graphics were a welcome update, they were understated and did not get your gaming juices flowing. The industry standard techno soundtrack that attacked your ears throughout got tiresome quickly, and although every camera angle was covered, it didn't actually help your gameplay, leaving you little time to react should an off camera attack occurred.It was a creditable offering but despite the enhancements, the original coin-op is still the definitive version of the game.

The retro vibe continued unabated with Activision's latest game in the ongoing *Pitfall!* series. *Pitfall! 3D – Beyond The Jungle* saw our jungle exploring hero Pitfall Harry Jnr. find a new female companion called Mira who wanted his help in freeing her imprisoned people from the hands of the evil Scourge.

This third-person perspective in the Pitfall! platform game gave you exactly what was expected, a standard platformer in the style of *Tomb Raider* smattered in fun. It remained loyal to the familiar style and feel of the original source material which was commendable. There was also the almost inclusion of the original Atari 2600 version of *Pitfall!* tucked away as an Easter egg, as was the case with the previous *Pitfall!* games. *



» [PlayStation] Solid Snake returns after a 10-year break better than ever before.



» [PlayStation] Deceptive looking with colourful cutesy graphics, *Klonoa* was a right old tester of a game.

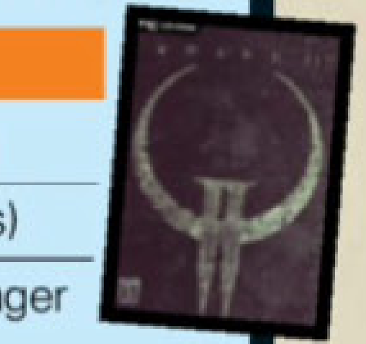
FEBRUARY 1998

NINTENDO 64



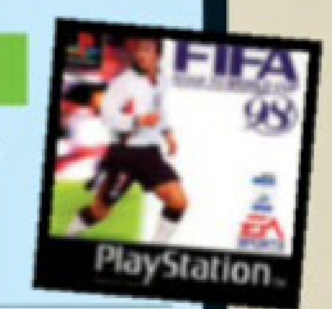
1 Diddy Racing Kong (Nintendo)
2 GoldenEye 007 (Nintendo)
3 FIFA '98: Road To The World Cup (Electronic Arts)
4 Mario Kart 64 (Nintendo)
5 Super Mario 64 (Nintendo)

PC



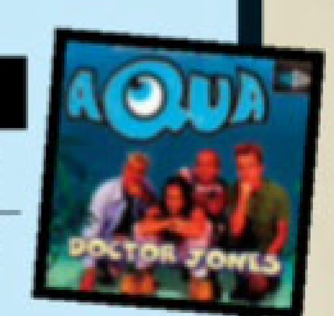
1 Quake 2 (Activision)
2 Tomb Raider 2 (Eidos)
3 Championship Manager 2: '97-98 (Eidos)
4 FIFA '98: Road To The World Cup (Electronic Arts)
5 Blade Runner (Virgin Games)

PLAYSTATION



1 FIFA '98: Road To The World Cup (Electronic Arts)
2 Final Fantasy VII (Sony)
3 Tomb Raider 2 (Eidos)
4 Toca Touring Car (Codemasters) (Namco)
5 Time Crisis (Sony)

MUSIC



1 Doctor Jones (Aqua)
2 My Heart Will Go On (Celine Dion)
3 Never Ever (All Saints)
4 You Make Me Wanna (Usher)
5 Gettin' Jiggy Wit It (Will Smith)

retroGAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL



Big Mac The Mad Maintenance Man

NO, NOT THE CHEESEBURGER

#85

» TONY KELLY » COMMODORE 16 » 1985

You might be forgiven for assuming you are taking on the role of a popular three-tier double cheeseburger, but the Big Mac we have here is the name of a quite insane maintenance man whose latest mission is to shut down all 15 power vaults of an enemy power station.

The story behind this is anybody's guess, but I like to imagine that they're hell-bent on destroying a popular fast-food restaurant empire. Mac's primary objective is to turn off all the switches in each of the 15 vaults. Once each vault is shut down he then has to make his way to the flashing EXIT which will suddenly appear to escape to the next vault. Throughout the game you will encounter enemy cannons, ladders, moving elevators, many dissolving platforms, and a rapidly depleting energy bar which serves as a time limit, so there's no hanging around. Every time Mac clears a level, the remaining energy will add points to your score and he will regain an extra life up to a maximum of four.

As platformers go, this is up there in the top tier. It starts off nice and simple to ease you in, but as you progress you will find out just how much more devious the level designs gradually become. It takes quick thinking, and you will often find yourself wanting to pull your hair out in frustration.

The graphics are pretty simple but they are crisp, bright and colourful. The sound effects are few, but the high pitched tones may have you turning the sound down low, however, the music on the rather nice title screen is quite fun and bouncy.

Anyway, this is a seriously addictive game which I still return to 26 years later. It's very good fun to play and the high score leaderboard means that even once completed it, you will soon be coming back for more trying to beat your previous score. It even rivals the excellent C64 version which was also programmed by T. Kelly. There's nothing cheesy about this Big Mac. *

BARRY FLOWERS


HI SCORE
019486

READERS' CHOICE

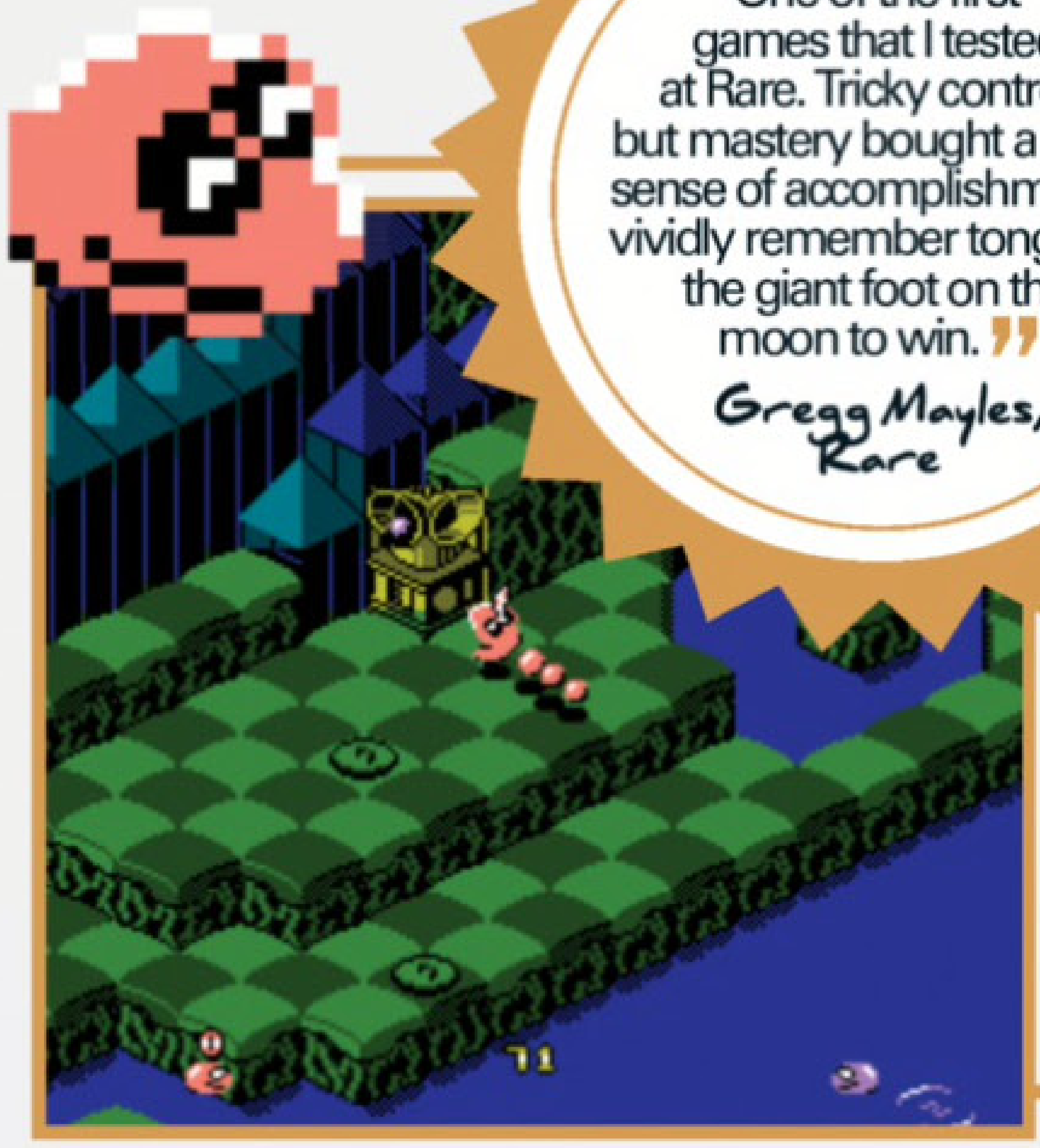


THE GREATEST NES GAMES

Nintendo's 8-bit machine established the company as the dominant force in the international console market, and it couldn't have done so without classic software. Nick Thorpe counts down its top 25 games, as voted for by Retro Gamer readers…

Original Nintendo Seal of Quality





> "One of the first games that I tested at Rare. Tricky controls but mastery bought a huge sense of accomplishment. I vividly remember tonguing the giant foot on the moon to win."
>
> Gregg Mayles, Rare

SNAKE RATTLE 'N' ROLL

■ **DEVELOPER:** Rare ■ **YEAR:** 1990 ■ **GENRE:** Platform

25 **Born from an** experimental drive to create a small NES cartridge, *Snake Rattle 'N' Roll* sees players chasing down and eating Nibbley Pibbleys in order to grow their snake, in order to tip the level's scales and open the door to the next stage. Rare's isometric action game is a tricky one to categorise – but that's not a bad thing, as it's a unique experience. Be sure to try the simultaneous two-player mode, too!

BUCKY O'HARE

■ **DEVELOPER:** Konami
■ **YEAR:** 1992 ■ **GENRE:** Platform

24 **The spotlight might** not have shone on *Bucky O'Hare* for long, but Konami ensured that he got a very good licensed platform game while it did. It's similar to *Mega Man* in structure, with Bucky seeking to rescue his crew members from the Toad Empire across a variety of planets, which can be tackled in any order. Arriving late in the life of the NES, *Bucky O'Hare* provided some of the most attractive visuals on the system alongside some pretty strong gameplay.



CHIP 'N DALE: RESCUE RANGERS

■ **DEVELOPER:** Capcom ■ **YEAR:** 1990
■ **GENRE:** Platform

23 **While Capcom is** best known for *Street Fighter* and *Resident Evil* today, the NES era saw the company make a name for itself based on a range of high quality platform games. The gameplay is good here, but it's striking how few cartoon licences capture the look and feel of their source material as well as *Chip 'N Dale,* the game boasts detailed sprites and colourful backgrounds which emphasise the size of our heroes.







EXCITEBIKE

■ **DEVELOPER:** Nintendo R&D1
■ **YEAR:** 1984 ■ **GENRE:** Racing

22 **One of the** interesting things about the NES is that the machine had a very long shelf life, with over a decade between its Japanese release as the Famicom and the final officially licensed games in the mid-Nineties. With so much time for developers to extract the best performance from the machine and all of the additional chips utilised over the years, it's easy to expect that the console's early releases would be overshadowed by the more complex games – but that's not the case, as games like *Excitebike* show.

Excitebike is a simple game. Either alone or with computer controlled riders, your goal is to beat target times on each course in order to progress. This is complicated by obstacles including grass, mud patches, barriers, and the ever-present ramps, which require players to correct their landing angle as they fall – a simple challenge, but one which remains challenging to consistently perform over a long period. Falling off your bike will cost you valuable time, as will overheating the bike by overusing the high speed button. As the game goes on, the courses become more complex, with high angle ramps and fewer clear stretches on the track.

> "Typical Nintendo, simple as anything, but hard to master, and it is so much fun."
>
> adippm82

The main thing that set *Excitebike* apart from other NES games was the inclusion of a level editor. While the option to save and load these creations was never available to the West as it required the Japan-only Famicom Data Recorder add-on, the mode extended the game's life considerably once they'd exhausted all of the pre-designed stages. While *Excitebike* might not have been the flashiest game in many players' NES collections, the combination of this mode and the compelling gameplay meant that it was often revisited.





“Great challenge and once you get used to it, a great platformer. No wonder we begged for a sequel for 25 years…”
ALK

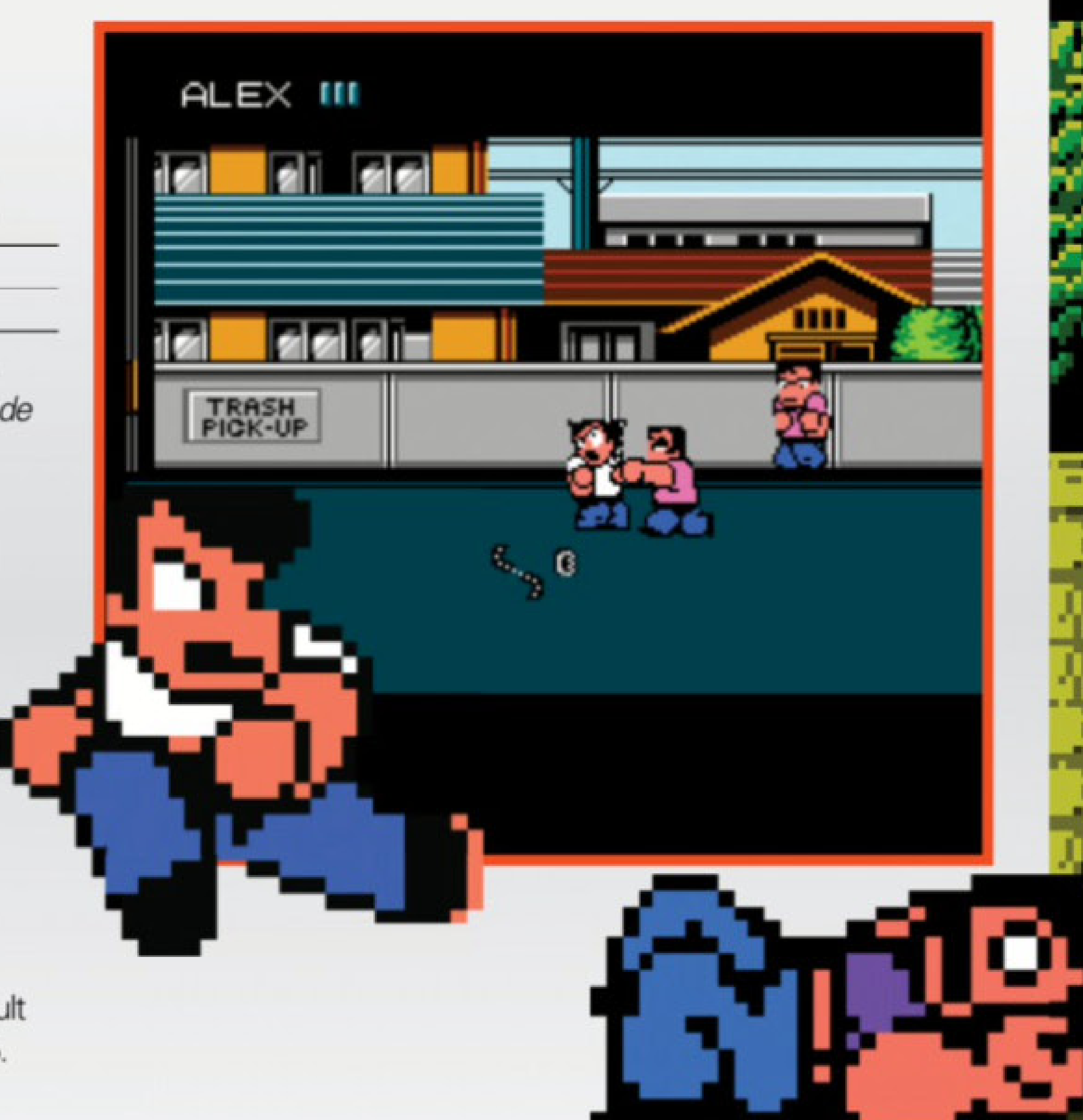
KID ICARUS

■ **DEVELOPER:** Nintendo R&D1 ■ **YEAR:** 1986 ■ **GENRE:** Platform

21 **Right from the** start, *Kid Icarus* is a game that just *feels* different from its platforming contemporaries. In other games you'll typically traverse a stage from left to right, but *Kid Icarus* starts you off by sending you on a skyward journey, with a playfield that wraps horizontally across the screen – when Pit walks off the right edge, he'll appear on the left. It's a feeling of difference that permeates the game, as while the game offers items and upgrades, it never crosses over into RPG territory. For many years this was one of Nintendo's forgotten properties, with only a Game Boy sequel to continue its lineage, until Pit's adventures were continued in the shooter *Kid Icarus: Uprising* on the Nintendo 3DS.

RIVER CITY RANSOM / STREET GANGS

■ **DEVELOPER:** Technos
■ **YEAR:** 1989 ■ **GENRE:** Beat-'em-up



20 **Following arcade success** with games such as *Renegade* and *Double Dragon*, beat-'em-up innovators Technos returned with a NES title that took the genre in a more console-focused direction. As well as beating up all manner of weirdly-named gangs like The Squids and The Generic Dudes, players can learn moves, develop stats, and even buy items. *River City Ransom* wasn't a huge success when it arrived in North America and it didn't fare a great deal better when it was released in Europe as *Street Gangs*, but the game's reputation has grown, thanks to a loyal cult following, earning its place in your top 25.



DOUBLE DRAGON

■ **DEVELOPER:** Technos ■ **YEAR:** 1988 ■ **GENRE:** Beat-'em-up

19 **The hit beat-'em-up** came to the NES, but rescuing Marian from the clutches of Machine Gun Willy wasn't quite the same proposition as in the arcades. For a start, the simultaneous two-player mode is nowhere to be found, and enemy numbers are limited. Further, stages received some interesting redesigns and all but the most basic fighting moves were gained through an experience system. Despite these changes, *Double Dragon* remained a compelling and challenging beat-'em-up that retained enough of the arcade essence to be truly worthy of the name. Multiplayer fans can also check out Mode B, which features larger character sprites in one-on-one battles and it even allows players to control enemy characters – an interesting novelty, to say the least.





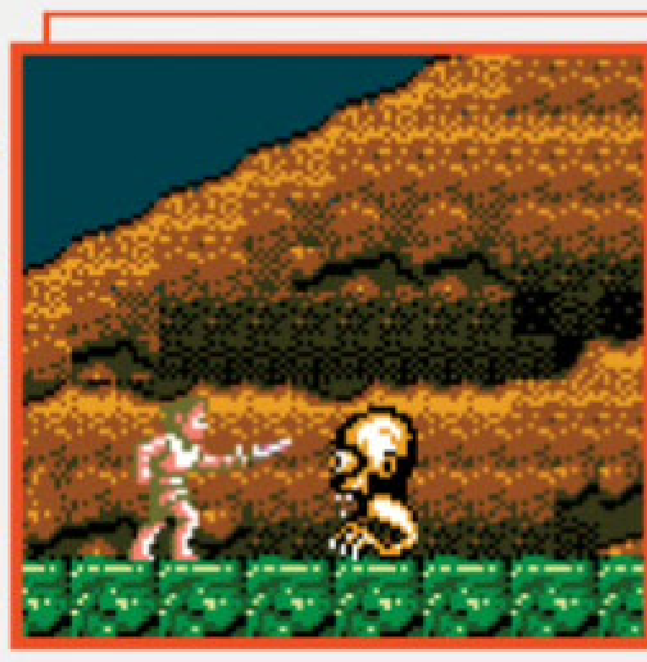
CASTLEVANIA III: DRACULA'S CURSE

■ **DEVELOPER:** Konami ■ **YEAR:** 1989 ■ **GENRE:** Platform

18 **We must admit** to being surprised, here – we were expecting this brilliant platformer to appear much higher in your ranking. The last of the major *Castlevania* games to appear on the NES was a prequel to the events of the first game, starring Simon Belmont's ancestor, Trevor Belmont, as he attempted to defeat Europe's most notorious vampire.

The game left the RPG elements of *Castlevania II: Simon's Quest* and returned to the platform action template of the original game. However, new improvements included a non-linear level structure, additional playable characters with their own unique abilities (including *Symphony Of The Night* star, Alucard) and a more challenging second quest for players that have finished the game. In part thanks to the use of the expensive MMC5 chip, *Castlevania III* boasts some of the most impressive visuals on the system, and the action is accompanied by an excellent soundtrack.







FAXANADU

■ **DEVELOPER:** Hudson Soft ■ **YEAR:** 1987 ■ **GENRE:** Action-RPG

16 **We hear your** cries, dear readers! *Faxanadu* is a game that you've highlighted as being something of a forgotten gem, and its appearance in the top 25 is testament to your strength of feeling on this matter. The player is cast as a wanderer who returns to his home town only to find it in a state of severe decline, and being attacked by dwarves. The high fantasy setting is aided by the fact that *Faxanadu* doesn't utilise the cartoonish look that many NES games adopted, giving it a more mature impression.

The game itself is a side-scrolling action-RPG of the kind that will be familiar to players of games such as *Zelda II* and *Wonder Boy III: The Dragon's Trap*. *Faxanadu* includes many of the key trappings of the RPG genre, with a protagonist whose capabilities grow with experience, a wide range of non-player characters to chat to, and full inventory options, but combat and exploration are handled in a traditional platform game fashion. Give it a go if you haven't yet played it – with prices hovering around £10, it won't break the bank and you wont regret it.

ZELDA II: THE ADVENTURE OF LINK

■ **DEVELOPER:** Nintendo R&D4 ■ **YEAR:** 1987 ■ **GENRE:** Action-RPG

17 **Despite huge sales** of over 4 million copies, the first *Zelda* sequel hasn't always received a huge amount of love over the years. However, lots of you hold the opinion that it is unfairly maligned and we're inclined to agree. *Link's Adventure* retained the first game's top-down viewpoint for overworld exploration, but the meat of the gameplay was found in side-scrolling combat sections. Additional RPG elements were also introduced in *Zelda II*, including experience levels, a magic system and more extensive interaction with the non-player characters you found in towns.

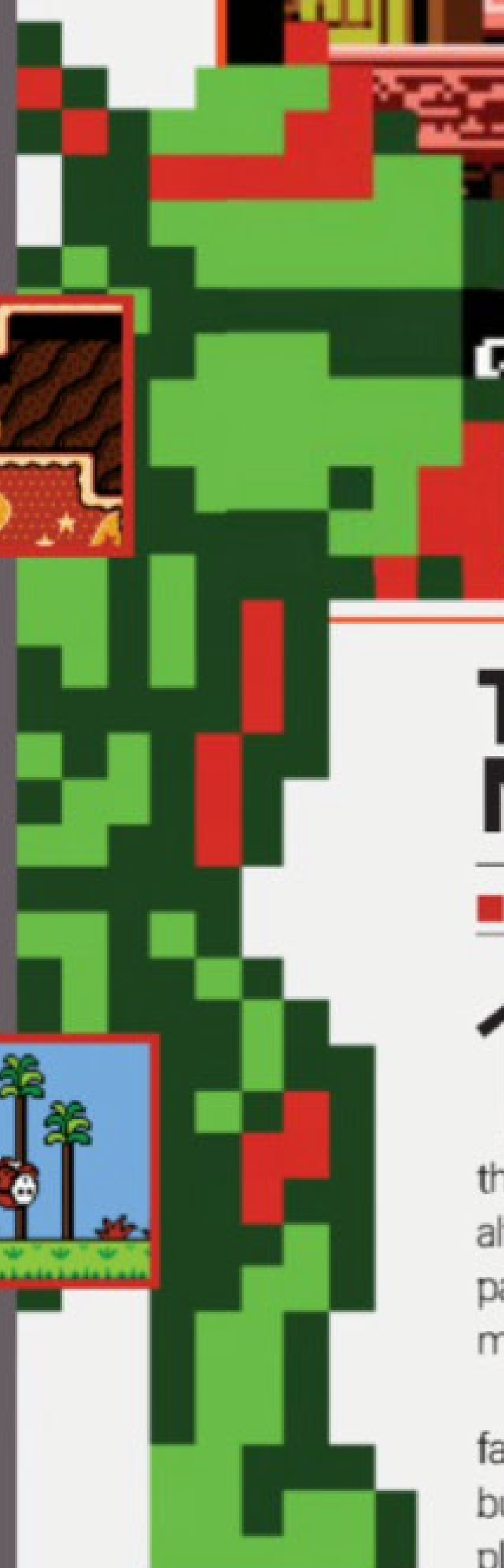
Players have come down hard on *Zelda II* for departing so heavily from the gameplay of the original title, and future 2D *Zelda* games stuck much more closely to the top-down action of the first game. However, it highlights Nintendo's willingness to experiment as a game developer – a commendable quality, even if it doesn't always guarantee popular results.

"I know people think it's the black sheep of the *Zelda* series, but it should be given a chance 'cos it's a great game."
SpockIOM



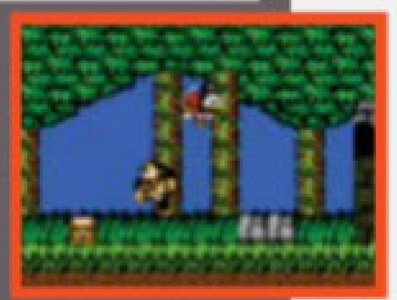






DUCKTALES

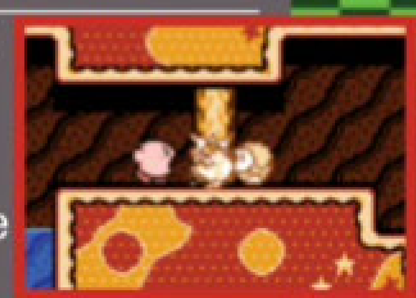
■ **DEVELOPER:** Capcom
■ **YEAR:** 1989 ■ **GENRE:** Platform



15 **Capcom offered an** excellent choice of licensed Disney platformers on the NES, and you guys liked *DuckTales* the most. We love Scrooge McDuck hopping around on his cane, and the structure which requires you to obtain items in various stages to progress is very cool.

KIRBY'S ADVENTURE

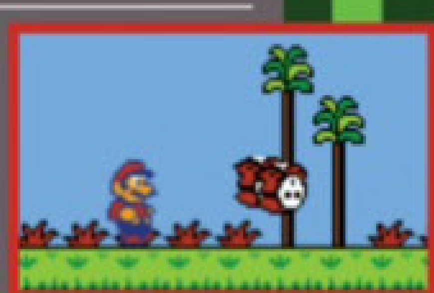
■ **DEVELOPER:** HAL Laboratory
■ **YEAR:** 1993 ■ **GENRE:** Platform



14 **Players that kept** their NES hardware deep into the 16-bit era were rewarded with this incredible platformer. It wasn't the hardest game to complete, but the ability to copy enemy attacks offered a twist on the platform genre which ensured that we remained interested throughout.

SUPER MARIO BROS. 2

■ **DEVELOPER:** Nintendo R&D4
■ **YEAR:** 1988 ■ **GENRE:** Platform



13 **While this *Mario* game** wasn't always a *Mario* game and feels slightly different as a result of that, the fact remains that it's still an excellently designed platformer. Being able to control Peach and Toad was very cool, and Luigi became distinct from his brother with his floaty jumps.

RC PRO-AM

■ **DEVELOPER:** Rare
■ **YEAR:** 1987 ■ **GENRE:** Racing



12 **This racer** is one of Rare's earliest hits on a Nintendo platform, and features radio-controlled cars battling to take victory across 24 tracks. We mean it when we say battling, too – these little cars pack some firepower, with bombs and missiles available to take out rivals.

MIKE TYSON'S PUNCH-OUT!!

■ **DEVELOPER:** Nintendo R&D3
■ **YEAR:** 1987 ■ **GENRE:** Fighting



11 **Taking the action** of Nintendo's arcade boxing series and taking it to the home consoles, *Punch-Out!!* knocked players out with memorable characters and compelling mechanics. Best of all, Tyson himself put in an appearance.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

■ **DEVELOPER:** Konami ■ **YEAR:** 1989 ■ **GENRE:** Platform

"The game that made me want a NES. I remember recording the ad for the Turtles box set and watching it every day."
RodimusPrime

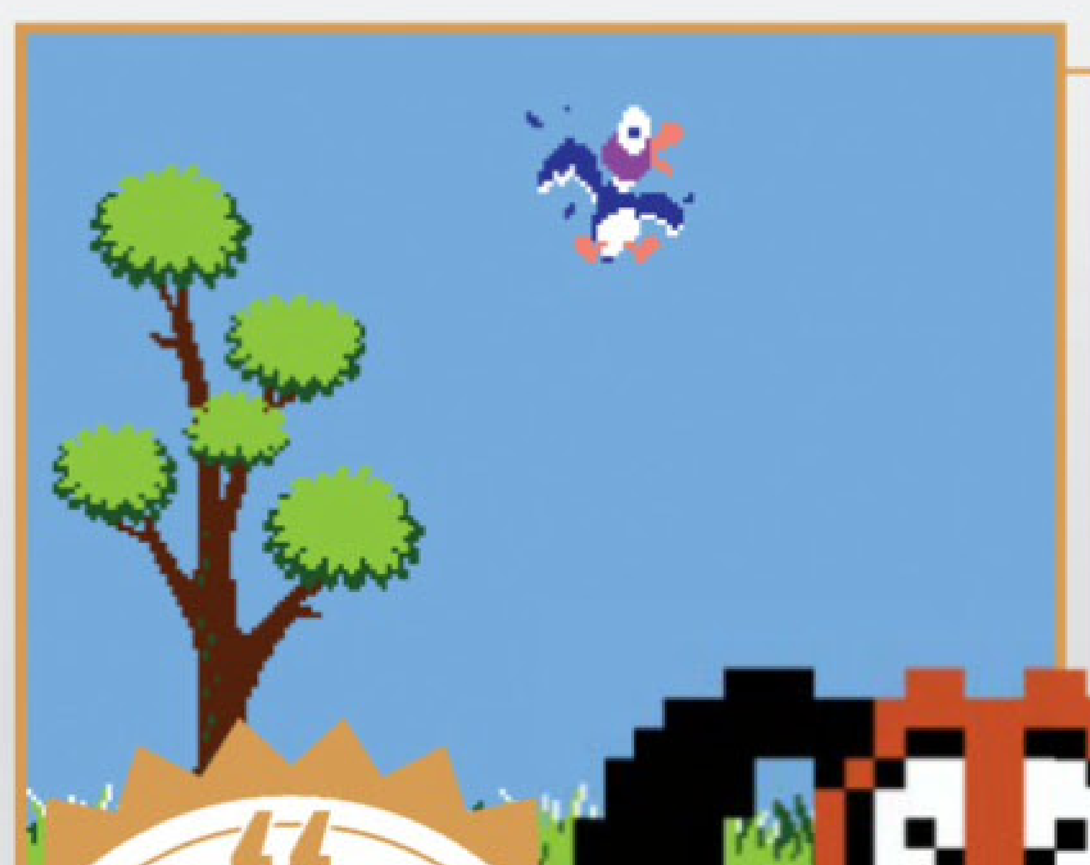
10 **If there was** one thing that kids couldn't get enough of in the late Eighties and early Nineties, it was this quartet of pizza-loving crime fighters, and Konami sensibly snapped up the videogame rights early. The result was a brilliant, strong platformer, although one which had the incredible ability to frustrate players – in particular, the infamous underwater bomb disarming stage is one of the most frustrating levels in any videogame ever.

While the game was popular internationally, UK-based Nintendo fans have a particular fondness for the game as its placement in a NES bundle over Christmas 1990 meant that it was the first game many players owned. The presence of the Turtles drove up desire for the NES, and even helped it briefly overtake Master System sales in the UK.



DUCK HUNT

■ **DEVELOPER:** Nintendo R&D1
■ **YEAR:** 1984 ■ **GENRE:** Lightgun Shoot-'em-up



9 **Packed in with** all but the basic NES console bundles, *Duck Hunt* was a cornerstone of many gamers' NES experiences and was the only Zapper title to make your top 25 list. What makes *Duck Hunt* so memorable is its simple yet captivating gameplay – one or two ducks fly out and you need to shoot them down, ideally with as few misses as possible. There's also the clay pigeon game in Mode C, in which discs fly into the distance.

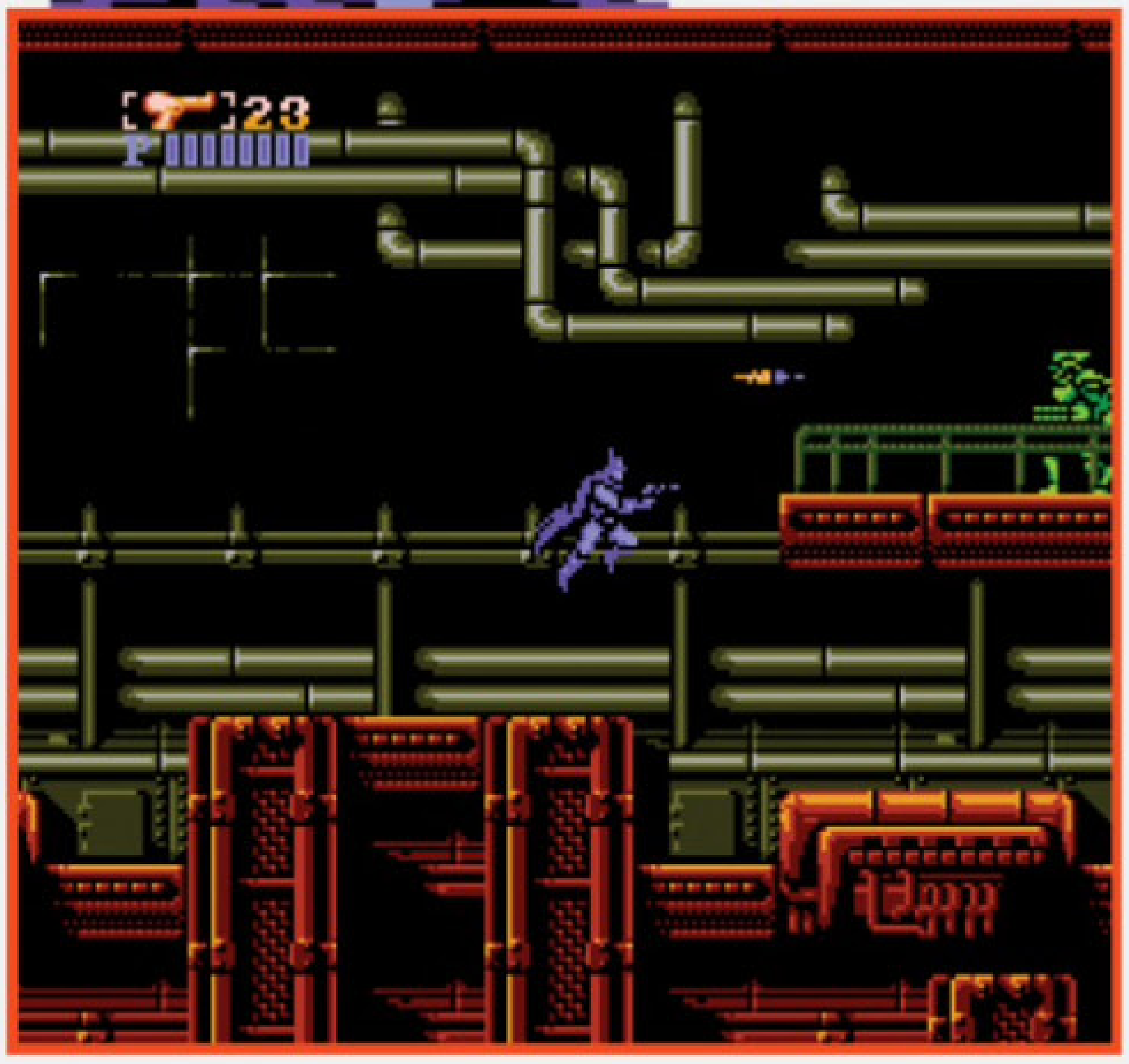
But let's be honest, it's all about bagging birds – and of course that pesky dog. He certainly adds character, proudly displaying your hits when you make them and mocking you when you fail to do so. Our canine companion's sniggering definitely triggers some of our more violent urges, but try as we might, we can never take out our frustrations on him by just blasting him away. That is true sadness, there.

"This is a great little game, introducing many a fresh keen-eyed marksman to the joys of the lightgun."
Jim Bagley, SpecialFX









BATMAN

■ **DEVELOPER:** Sunsoft ■ **YEAR:** 1989 ■ **GENRE:** Platform

8 **The caped crusader** has had a number of videogame incarnations over the years, but few have accompanied a peak interest in Batman like this one, which followed in the wake of the 1989 film starring Michael Keaton. The videogame was themed after the film and took the form of a platformer which allowed you to fight the likes of Killer Moth, Firebug and, of course, the Joker as you sought to clean up Gotham. The game has since achieved recognition on its own terms, with one company even releasing an action figure in NES colours.

While Batman's weaponry was present, one of the coolest features in *Batman* was actually the ability to leap off walls with a secondary jump. Rarely seen at the time, this feature enabled our hero to ascend through narrow vertical passages and save himself from otherwise fatal situations.

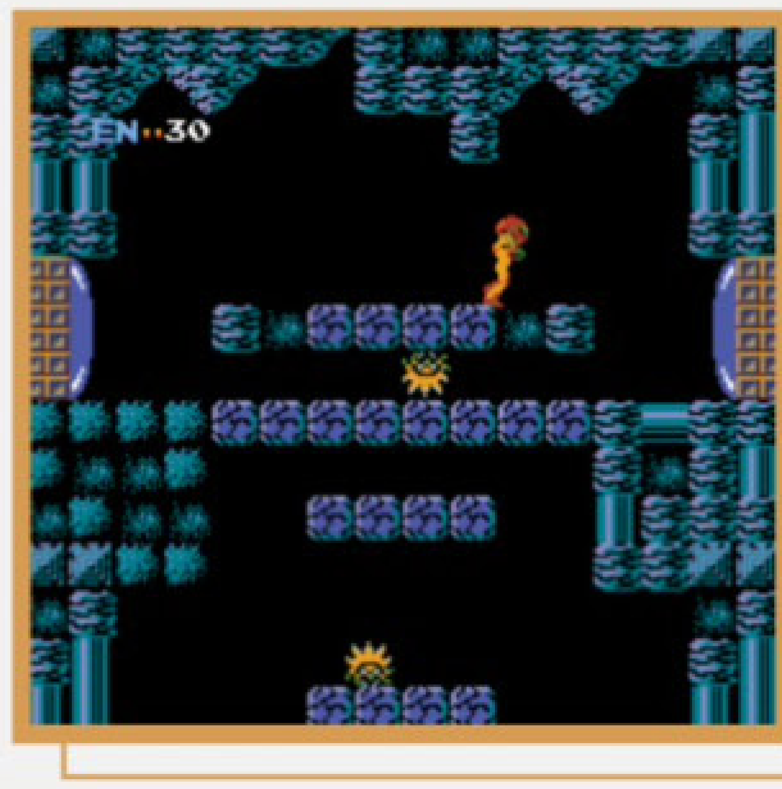


METROID

■ **DEVELOPER:** Nintendo ■ **YEAR:** 1986 ■ **GENRE:** Platform

7 **At its heart,** *Metroid* is a simple game – a platform-shooter in which Samus Aran seeks to recapture the dangerous Metroid organisms, set on the planet Zebes. However, it introduced many players to a new style of platform game, in which exploration was key and new abilities enabled access to additional areas. This template is so closely associated with *Metroid* that it co-named the Metroidvania subgenre, along with the *Castlevania* series which later adopted this style.

While the action is all well and good, *Metroid*'s best bits are the memorable twists which stick in the memory long after you've beaten the game. The revelation that Samus Aran is a female protagonist might have lost its shock factor, but its importance remains. As for the other twist – well, don't put your pad down after Mother Brain has been defeated…



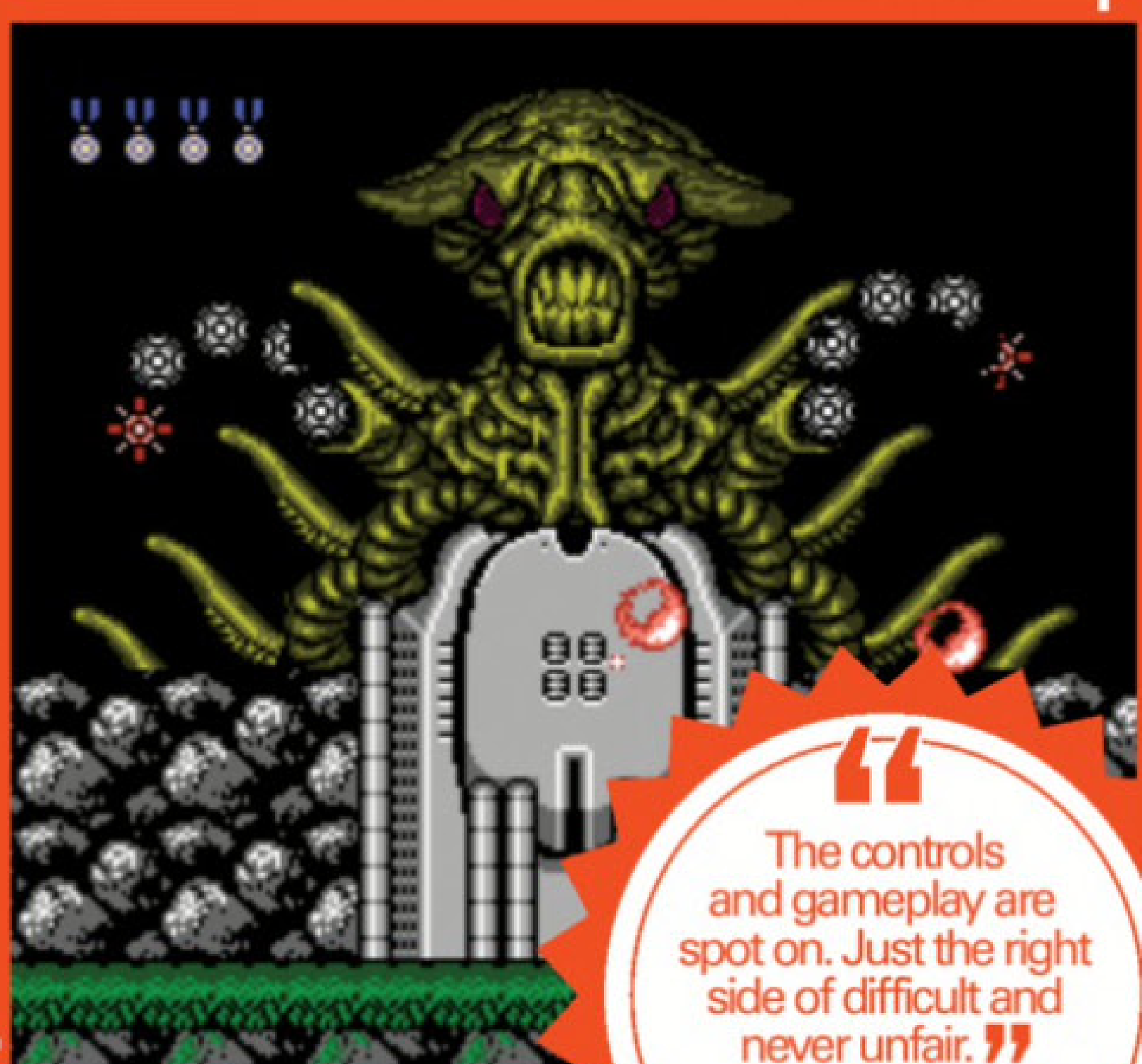
CASTLEVANIA

■ **DEVELOPER:** Konami ■ **YEAR:** 1986 ■ **GENRE:** Platform

6 **Konami's developers rarely** seemed more at home than when they were working on the NES, coming up with hits such as *Castlevania*. Borrowing some thematic cues from Capcom's *Ghosts 'n Goblins*, the game casts you as Simon Belmont, a vampire hunter out to kill Dracula. Each stage pits you against all manner of supernatural villains, but is well-designed to fit the crumbling castle theme and offers strong level design. The game is visually strong and offers memorable tunes, while tight control enables precise platforming and offers the use of secondary weapons such as axes and crucifixes, rounding off an excellent package.



"Me and my brother would play it and we'd be like 'who's going to be Arnie, who's going to be Stallone?'"
Claudio Sanchez, Coheed and Cambria

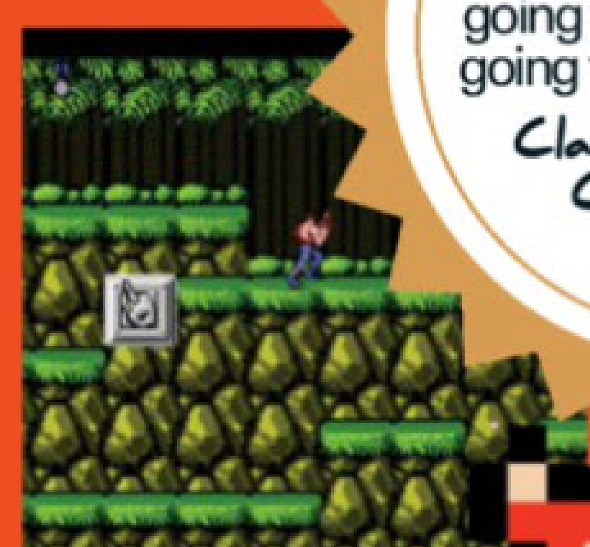


"The controls and gameplay are spot on. Just the right side of difficult and never unfair."
theantmeister

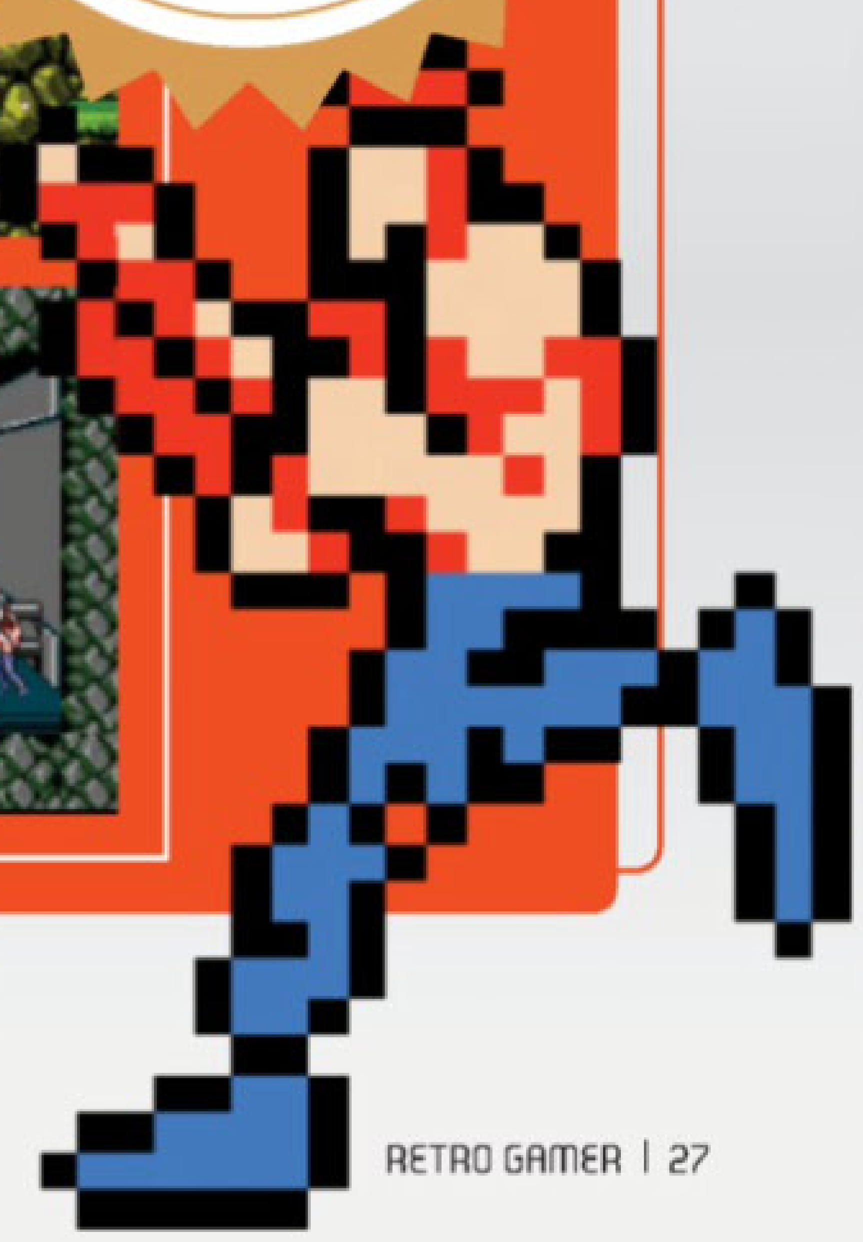
CONTRA / PROBOTECTOR

■ **DEVELOPER:** KONAMI
■ **YEAR:** 1988 ■ **GENRE:** Run-and-gun

5 **This classic run-and-gun** is your favourite arcade conversion for the NES. *Contra* is a great example of Konami at the height of its powers. While the NES version of *Contra* makes a few changes from the coin-op, the game still offers the key things that make it so appealing: frantic action and a very stiff challenge. Though the game was renamed for Europe and censored in order to circumvent German censorship laws, the gameplay shone through.









> “The Legend Of Zelda brought the true power of the role-playing genre to console players and remains today one of the greatest RPGs in history.” *Trip Hawkins, EA*

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA

■ **DEVELOPER:** Nintendo R&D4 ■ **YEAR:** 1986 ■ **GENRE:** Action-RPG

4 **From the second** you start Link's first adventure and set off towards the cave, the game starts sinking its hooks into you with the most lo-fi rendition of the now-familiar theme music – and just as later *Zelda* games can trace their elaborate scores back to Koji Kondo's chip music, they can do the same with their game design. The original *Legend Of Zelda* exemplifies the excellence of the core *Zelda* formula – a mixture of exploration, puzzles, and combat that draws you into the game until you're determined to see it through to the end. Plus, who doesn't love those beautiful gold cartridges?



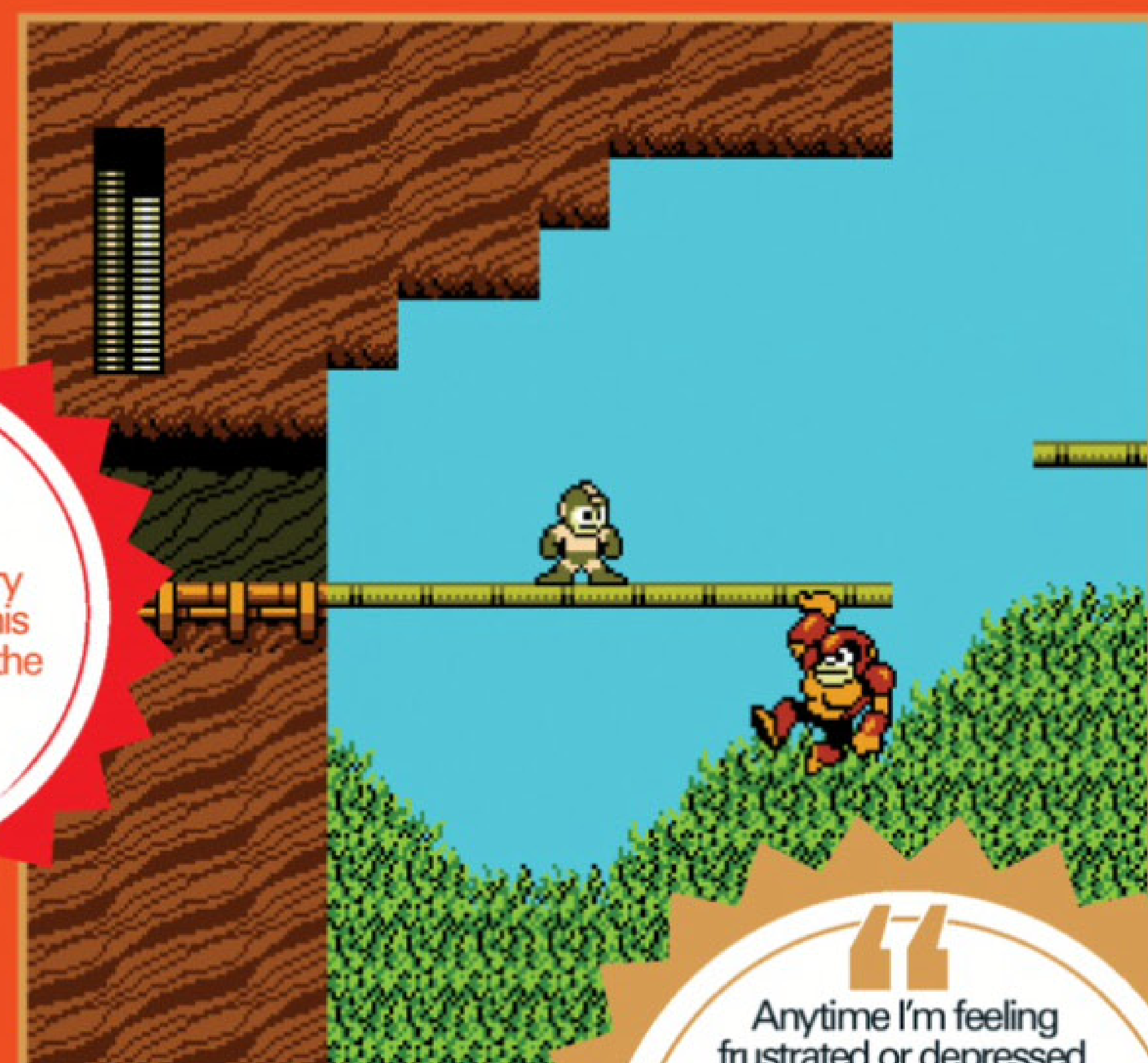
MEGA MAN 2

■ **DEVELOPER:** Capcom
■ **YEAR:** 1988 ■ **GENRE:** Platform

3 **After almost three** decades of *Mega Man* games, it's easy to forget that the first one was not a tremendous financial success for Capcom. As a result, the company didn't give the green light for a sequel immediately – the development team was permitted to work on *Mega Man 2,* but was also required to work on other projects simultaneously. As a result, it was common for staff to work very long hours making the game, often staying in the office well past their regular working hours. *Mega Man 2* was a real labour of love.

For teams developing sequels, it can be tricky to work out what is broken and in need of fixing, and what is better left alone. Capcom trod that fine line carefully and reaped the rewards. Elements that were preserved from the original game include its platform-shooter set up and its non-linear structure, in which a player chooses a stage based on which Robot Master they'd like to take down. As before, once you've downed a boss you'll gain access to their weapon, some of which are more effective than others.

However, it's the improvements which make *Mega Man 2* the best of its series. Not only is it superior to its predecessor, the brutal difficulty level of the first game has been toned down. The game is still no pushover, but its challenge is more likely to cause fun than frustration – which is a good job since the game has eight Robot Masters, up from six in the first game. *Mega Man 2* went on to sales success and established the blue bomber as a star, a richly deserved outcome for one of the best NES games ever.



> “Nigh on perfect controls, great weaponry and a very fair difficulty make this the stand out title for the NES.” *ArchaicKoala*



> “Anytime I'm feeling frustrated or depressed, or I'm lamenting the industry, all I have to do is load up *Mega Man 2.* I revert to being eight again, and I can't help but be happy, and smile.” *Jaime Griesemer, ex-Bungie, Halo 3 lead designer*

> The godfather of platform games – the game that spawned one million imitations. Nintendo have been the most influential game developer of all time setting so many trends and such a high quality bar that we can easily forget the magnitude of their importance.
>
> Jon Hare, Sensible Software



SUPER MARIO BROS.

■ **DEVELOPER:** Nintendo R&D4 ■ **YEAR:** 1985 ■ **GENRE:** Platform

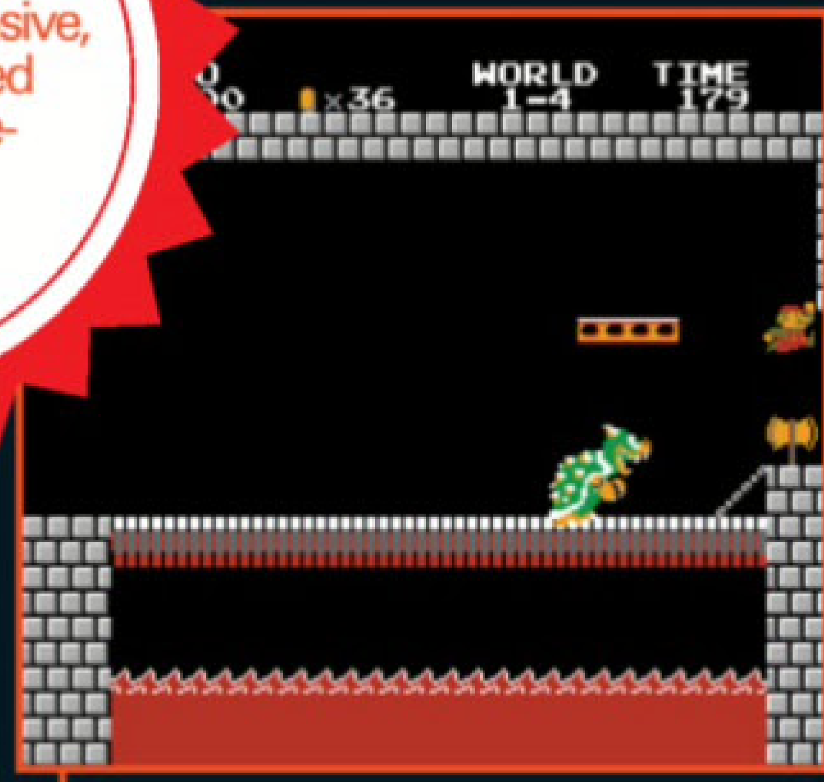
2 **We miss the** days of pack-in games. During the Eighties and Nineties, console manufacturers often seemed to make a special effort to ensure that every buyer would have at least one excellent game to play – and *Super Mario Bros.* was most definitely an excellent game. While Mario had made his debut in *Donkey Kong* and become a headline name in *Mario Bros.*, it wasn't until *Super Mario Bros.* that he became a real star. Whether it was alone or combined with *Duck Hunt*, *Super Mario Bros.*' long-term status as a pack-in game meant that over 40 million gamers would get to experience this star-making game.

One of the key secrets of *Super Mario Bros.*' success is that the game explains itself very well through level design alone. The initial screens are a masterpiece of game design, as you're wordlessly taught the function of enemies, mushrooms and question blocks. As the first game that many players experienced on a new system – and as the NES introduced so many players to videogames – this ease of learning was absolutely vital.

The learning curve also disguised that *Super Mario Bros.* was a complex game for its time, splicing many disparate elements of game design. We'd seen sections that allowed you to skip ahead in *Pitfall!*, power-ups in *Pac-Man* and bosses in *Phoenix*, but all of these combined in *Super Mario Bros.* to make an adventure of a kind never seen before. The variety was aided by the secrets that the game offered, from hidden items to warp zones, and difficulty was perfectly pitched to ensure while *Super Mario Bros.* posed enough challenge to last, but was no ordeal. Games that complement consoles this well are exceedingly rare.



> The original and still a complete classic. Fast, responsive, superbly designed and endlessly re-playable.
>
> nakamura



> To me *Super Mario Bros.* original for NES is the definitive *Super Mario* platformer. Not only did it set a new benchmark for platformers, it also had an awesome soundtrack.
>
> Jim Bagley, SpecialFX



RETRO GAMER READERS' CHOICE



"Seriously, this has to be the most impressive game to ever fit on a cartridge. There's so much gameplay, so much challenge packed into this cartridge… I can't tell you how addicting it was. I did finish the game and what a tour de force it was back in 1990. This game's inspiration is what started Id Software – we replicated the first level as a test and sent it to Nintendo!"

John Romero, id Software



"An astounding sequel – so much so that the later games have to be considered evolutionary after this revolutionary leap."

ArchaicKoala

5 reasons why it's great

1 Items like the Super Leaf gave Mario new abilities such as flight, enabling new level designs.

2 It offers a huge amount of content, with dozens of stages for players to tackle and master.

3 Even the level selection screen exudes character, thanks to its framing as an animated map.

4 If there's a argument against hopping around in a shoe, we have never heard it.

5 It perfected the *Mario* model, providing the template for every 2D *Mario* adventure since.

"Remains for me the pinnacle of 2D platform gaming. Imaginative, infuriating, wonderful, frustrating, joyful, tearful and ultimately entirely rewarding and magical. I kept the NES on for a week to prevent loss of progress."

Gregg Mayles, Rare







SUPER MARIO BROS. 3

■ **DEVELOPER:** Nintendo R&D4 ■ **YEAR:** 1988 ■ **GENRE:** Platform



1 **For Nintendo R&D4,** developing *Super Mario Bros. 3* must have been a tough task. It would have been absurd to expect the development team to take an already-beloved classic and improve upon it in every single aspect. It is to the credit of Shigeru Miyamoto and his team that they didn't just attempt it, but managed to succeed in doing so.

The Japanese version of *Super Mario Bros. 2* (known internationally as *The Lost Levels*) had been a very small upgrade over its predecessor, with slightly improved visuals and a few new hazards (such as the Poision Mushroom), and primarily offered more challenging stages for players that had mastered the original game. Contrast this with *Super Mario Bros. 3*, which offered all-new visuals, new music with additional sound effects, a variety of new enemy types, new power-ups, new blocks – if you could name something in the original *Super Mario Bros.*, Nintendo had managed to identify and implement a fantastic new spin on it in their new game.

These new elements allowed for some incredibly clever level designs too, from the floating platform challenge of stage 1-4 to the complex cannon arrangements of the airship levels. Many stages take new mechanics, implement them in every way you can think of, and then add a few you had missed just for good measure. Even something as simple as the introduction of sloped surfaces allowed for a new move and new opportunities for fun, as Mario could slide downhill on his backside and take out enemies with his momentum alone. What is truly amazing is that the high quality, inventive level designs are so consistent, given how numerous they are – the game's eight worlds feature an astonishing 90 stages.

With the American audience whipped into fever pitch by pre-release footage in the movie *The Wizard*, *Super Mario Bros. 3* was always going to do well. Even so, the game was an unprecedented commercial success, becoming the best-selling non-bundled NES game – and along with its predecessor, one of only two such games to exceed the 10 million mark. The game has been ported and remade often and continues to perform remarkably, selling over 3 million copies when remade for the Game Boy Advance, and another million as a Virtual Console game on the Wii.

Super Mario Bros. 3 is a game that contains just about everything that a fan of platform games could want. If you want a game with tight, responsive control, that's covered. If you want variety, the game offers dozens of levels, many enemies and an array of interesting power-ups. If you want clean, attractive visuals and timeless tunes, this classic beast of a game has them. If there is such a thing as a perfect videogame, *Super Mario Bros. 3* is the closest that the NES ever got to delivering it.

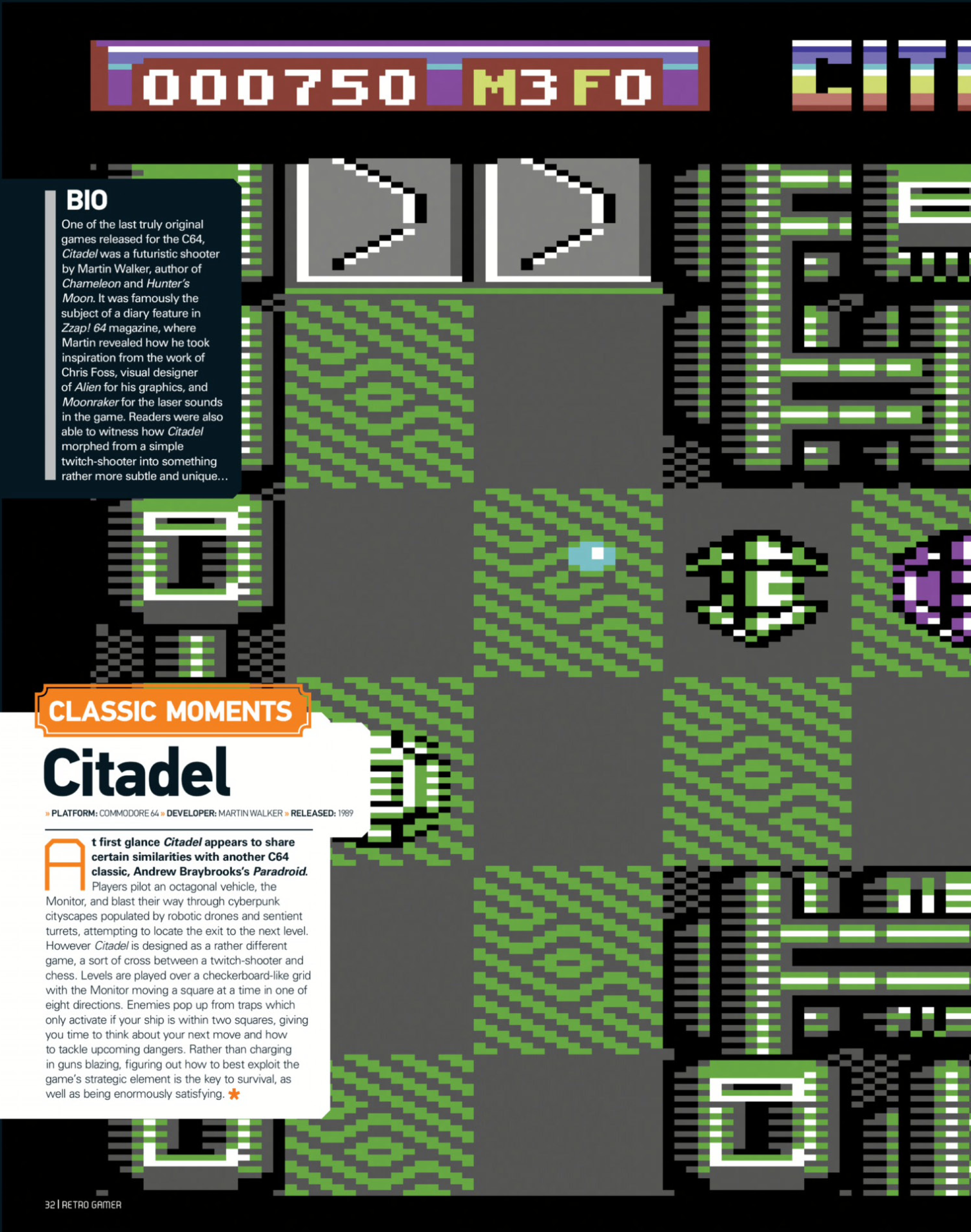


"In 1991 as a birthday treat my Dad took me to the World Of Commodore show and offered to buy anything I wanted. We left empty handed and instead bought *Super Mario Bros. 3*."

Steve Lycett, Sumo Digital







BIO

One of the last truly original games released for the C64, *Citadel* was a futuristic shooter by Martin Walker, author of *Chameleon* and *Hunter's Moon*. It was famously the subject of a diary feature in *Zzap! 64* magazine, where Martin revealed how he took inspiration from the work of Chris Foss, visual designer of *Alien* for his graphics, and *Moonraker* for the laser sounds in the game. Readers were also able to witness how *Citadel* morphed from a simple twitch-shooter into something rather more subtle and unique…

CLASSIC MOMENTS

Citadel

» **PLATFORM:** COMMODORE 64 » **DEVELOPER:** MARTIN WALKER » **RELEASED:** 1989

At first glance *Citadel* appears to share certain similarities with another C64 classic, Andrew Braybrooks's *Paradroid*. Players pilot an octagonal vehicle, the Monitor, and blast their way through cyberpunk cityscapes populated by robotic drones and sentient turrets, attempting to locate the exit to the next level. However *Citadel* is designed as a rather different game, a sort of cross between a twitch-shooter and chess. Levels are played over a checkerboard-like grid with the Monitor moving a square at a time in one of eight directions. Enemies pop up from traps which only activate if your ship is within two squares, giving you time to think about your next move and how to tackle upcoming dangers. Rather than charging in guns blazing, figuring out how to best exploit the game's strategic element is the key to survival, as well as being enormously satisfying. ✱



MORE CLASSIC CITADEL MOMENTS

Disposable Friends



Double-tapping the fire button brings up a reticle that allows you to capture nearby enemies. Captured drones can be controlled with the joystick allowing you to position them between your ship and enemy fire. This means you can then use them as a handy shield against hostile bullets or even as a battering ram against pesky enemies.

Powering Up



Some traps are benign, opening to reveal goodies including switches to disable lethal door lasers and handy health pickups. Indeed, locating that elusive health pod when you are running low on juice is tremendously welcome. There are also a number of neat weapon power-ups, from high velocity bullets to scattershot weapons and backward firing guns.

Luring The Enemy


The enemies all have varying attack attributes. Some will attack if you engage them, others fire in certain directions, meaning you can take them out from the right position without them being able to shoot you. Later on, you meet drones that hunt you down. One tactic is to get them to kill themselves by luring them into the laser beams across certain doorways.

Running The Gauntlet



Unlike *Paradroid*'s single layout which never changes across the various levels of the game, each of the eight cities in *Citadel* has a unique design and theme, from the shiny corridors of the early stages to the gothic visual presentation of the final city. They are all fiendishly designed, with a interconnecting layout of floors linked by various lift shafts to negotiate.


BATMAN

When Jon Ritman delivered Match Day to Ocean Software he was given a game that would inspire his next project. Rory Milne learns how Knight Lore and Channel 4 reruns of a classic TV show inspired an isometric Batman

You could forgive Jon Ritman for taking a break after presenting his seminal football title *Match Day* to Ocean co-founder David Ward. But just hours after a subsequent visit to see friends at developer Crystal Computing, Jon had already started planning his next game. "I had gone to Manchester to hand over the final copy of *Match Day*. [David Ward] told me that Ocean was distributing Ultimate's new game and that I needed to take a look at it. Whenever I was in Manchester I used to visit Crystal, and so shortly after being given *Knight Lore* I loaded it up with several of Crystal's guys standing around to see what the fuss was about. I was completely knocked sideways by the game and I wasn't alone. I simply had no idea how they had done the layering of the graphics having never seen masked bitmaps. I voiced this out loud, Simon Brattel claimed to know but refused to tell me, the bastard. The game was just what I wanted to do – a 'playable Disney cartoon,' I called it at the time."

It was obvious to Jon, however, that *Knight Lore* was as much a product of accomplished pixel art as clever coding, which led to a decision to introduce a friend with a talent for drawing cartoons to a computer arts package. "Some friends of mine had formed a band and Bernie [Drummond] was [their] drummer. Bernie drew stuff all the time and I could see he was much better than I was. I didn't know anyone else who was even half as good as Bernie. The package that Bernie used was written before he was on the scene, although I constantly added features. It was a simple joystick-driven drawing package that I think I called 'Pablo's Paintbrush'. The package was drawing using an XOR (exclusive or) function so each time it went over a pixel it changed state. Bernie just seemed to wiz the cursor around and around. I watched this for two hours with nothing more than a mess of dots being produced. I was convinced he wasn't ever going to get anything out of it when he suddenly stopped and said, 'That's a good eye.' He was right; somehow this random stuff had produced a nice eye. Bernie got careful, deleting everything except the eye and drawing another just like it. Within a very short time he produced a full character that was used in the game. Bernie christened it, 'Budweiser' – don't ask me why."

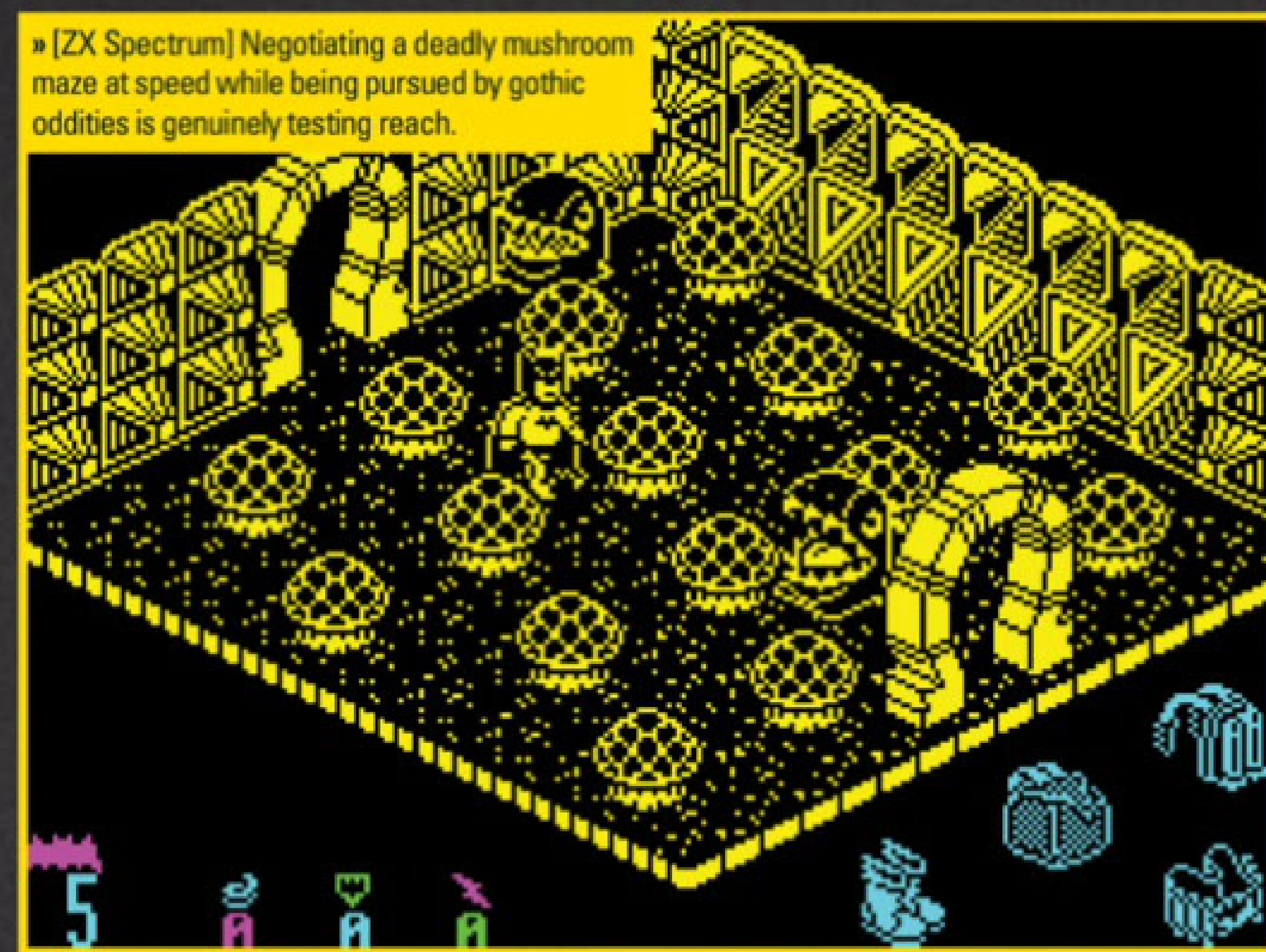


"BATMAN 101"

■ A sprawling isometric Batcave contains seven sections of a disassembled Batcraft. Finding and assembling these requires collection of equipment allowing Batman to jump, glide and carry objects and is made easier by invulnerability, extra-speed and higher-jump power-ups. Securing objects and progressing through locations depends on dexterity and solving logistic puzzles.

When asked about this first bitmap, Bernie Drummond credits 'Pablo's Paintbrush' for allowing him to make the jump from pen to pixel. "At first, I found pixel nudging very restrictive – a curve was achieved by calculating a series of steps rather than a flourishing pen stroke – but soon the advantages of XOR and cut/paste became apparent. Jon's art package was the key; at the time it enabled me to see a real-size sprite on the same screen as the magnification I was working on, so I could see what adding or removing a pixel did to the finished graphic."

As well as artistic contributions, Jon recalls Bernie's TV viewing habits helping to decide the player character for the pair's emerging project, which they soon mocked-up for Ocean's 'child at heart' co-founder, David Ward. "I had a conversation with Bernie, saying we needed a recognisable character – either a legendary figure, or something more current – and gave Batman as an example before saying that was no good as it had been off of the TV for so long. Bernie then told me I was wrong and [that] the Sixties series was being shown on Channel 4 and loads of kids were watching it. Bernie drew [an] animation of Batman walking, I mocked up a room, got the animation walking around in it – this was before the engine was written – and took it to Manchester. Now, I want you to imagine a little kid playing choo-choo trains, running around pumping their arms back ▶



» [ZX Spectrum] Negotiating a deadly mushroom maze at speed while being pursued by gothic oddities is genuinely testing reach.



IN THE KNOW

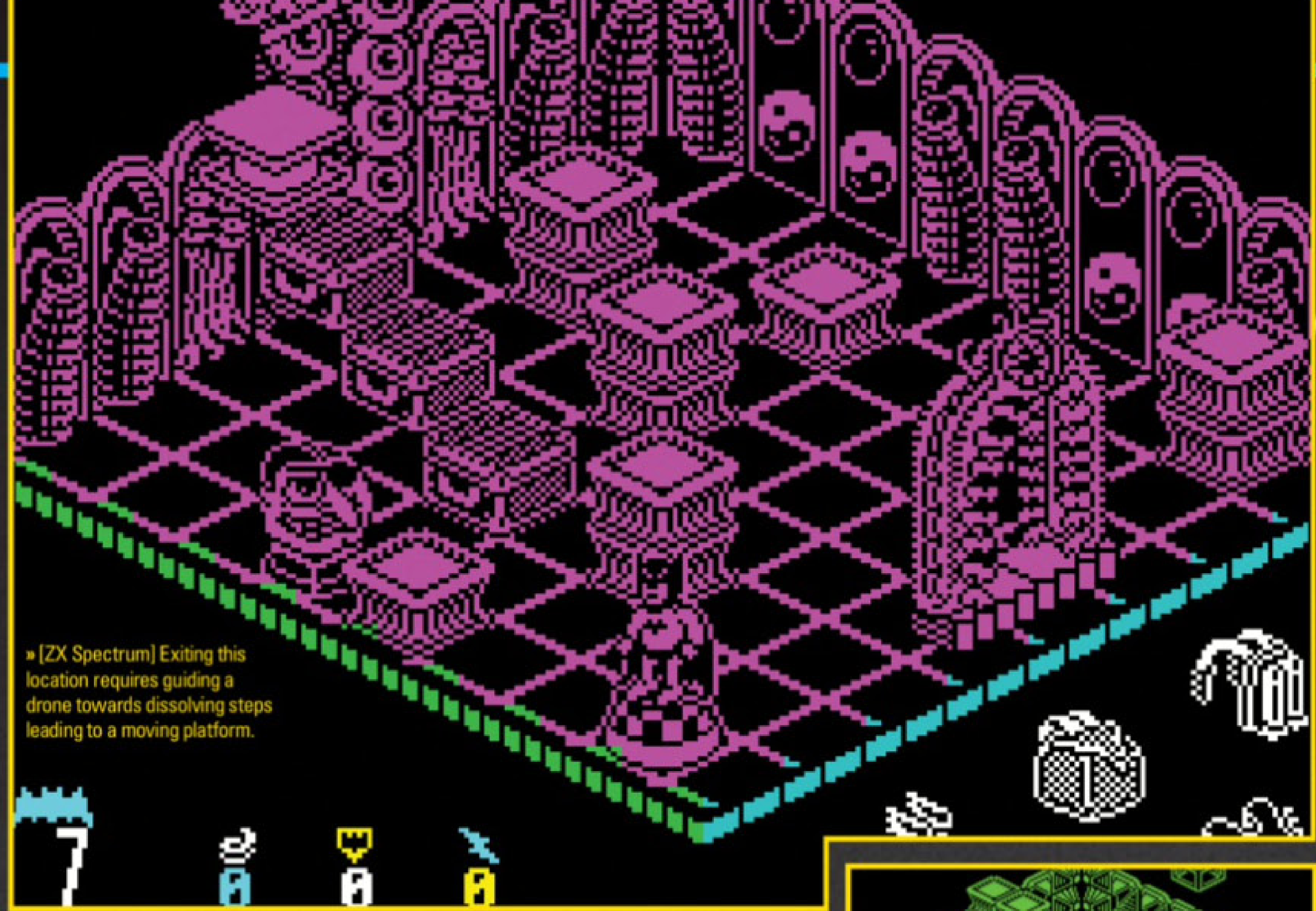
- » **PUBLISHER:** OCEAN SOFTWARE
- » **DEVELOPER:** JON RITMAN AND BERNIE DRUMMOND
- » **RELEASED:** 1986
- » **PLATFORM:** VARIOUS
- » **GENRE:** PLATFORMER / PUZZLER



» [ZX Spectrum] Batcave locations simply require crossing without falling but these areas feature impressive visuals.



» [ZX Spectrum] The first step to securing one piece of the Batcraft is heading a giant bubble.



» [ZX Spectrum] Exiting this location requires guiding a drone towards dissolving steps leading to a moving platform.

PIXEL PERFECT HEROES

More heroic games with memorable sprites



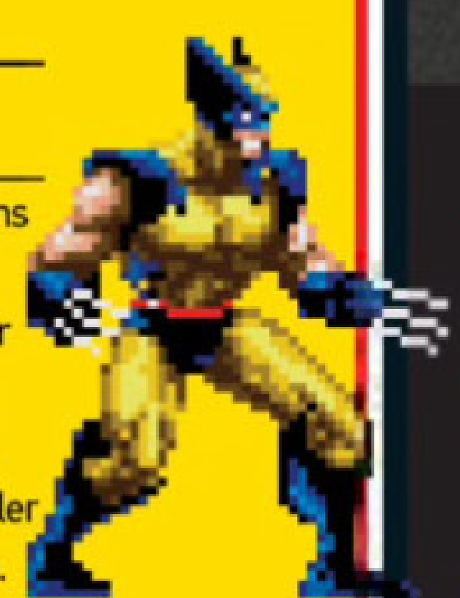
SUPERMAN
■ SYSTEM: Arcade ■ YEAR: 1988

The villains in Taito's coin-op are just as odd as Bernie Drummond's *Batman* foes, but the game still looks just like a DC comic. Gameplay highlights include pummelling aliens and vaporising motherships in heat-vision fuelled shoot-'em-up sections.



THE INCREDIBLE HULK
■ SYSTEM: Various ■ YEAR: 1994

Released long before the *Hulk* movies, Probe's console platformer provides great fan-service by featuring bosses that look and act just like their comicstrip counterparts. Hulk's destructive nature is also perfectly captured with attacks such as a handclap that rips henchmen apart.



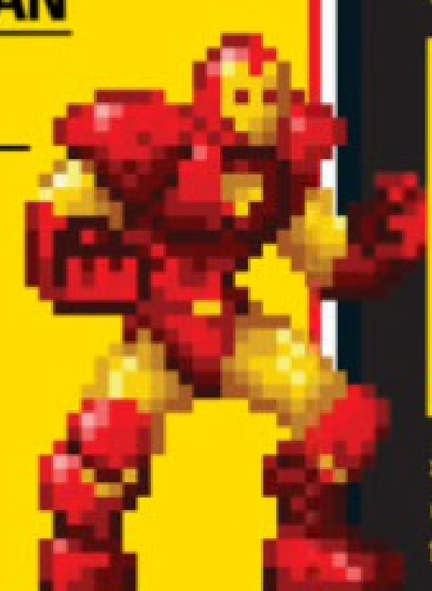
WOLVERINE: ADAMANTIUM RAGE
■ SYSTEM: Mega Drive, SNES
■ YEAR: 1994

The Mega Drive and SNES incarnations of *Adamantium Rage* offer different takes on Marvel's mutant, which offer faithful visuals but suffer from flaws. The Mega Drive platformer demands precise combat while the SNES brawler features an underpowered Wolverine.



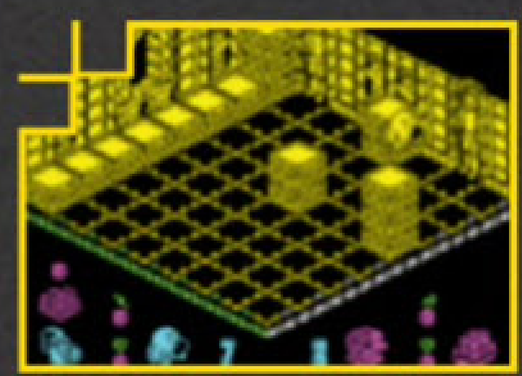
SPIDER-MAN: MYSTERIO'S MENACE
■ SYSTEM: Game Boy Advance
■ YEAR:2002

Spider-Man's first GBA outing impresses with multi-frame, sprite animations that allow for a web-crawler who matches the agility shown by the character in the comics. Also of note are the game's special effects laden set-piece boss encounters.



THE INVINCIBLE IRON MAN
■ SYSTEM: Game Boy Advance
■ YEAR:2002

Although short but sweet in terms of playing time, The *Invincible Iron Man* boasts beautiful pixel-art. The game provides a satisfying simulation of the metal-shelled hero's weapon-laden armour as well as intense platformer focused gameplay.



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

HEAD OVER HEELS
(PICTURED)
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1987

MATCH DAY II
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1987

MONSTER MAX
SYSTEM: GAME BOY
YEAR: 1994



» [Amstrad PCW] Jon Ritman faithfully reproduced *Batman* on the monochrome PCW after some technical support from Amstrad.



» [Amstrad CPC] This CPC *Batman* colour scheme was nicknamed 'ice cream and green' during the development process.



» [MSX] Aside from its muted colours, the MSX *Batman* is identical to the Spectrum original.

and forth. Now put a full-grown, nearly bald man in the kid's place, singing the theme from the Sixties series – that was David Ward!"

Ocean's other co-founder, Jon Woods, remembers having to negotiate the deal that would facilitate Batman's first videogame appearance, "I ultimately had a relationship with DC Comics. I [first] had a relationship with Warner Brothers in London – it was Universal, actually, but they handled Warner Brothers. They didn't want to license the game because *Batman* the movie was coming out. They didn't want anything to clutter it. But we did end up getting both."

With an artist and licence in place, Jon Ritman started work on *Batman*'s coding and design, which would require an 11-hour workday where Jon favoured spending time with his girlfriend over sleep. "A typical day would be to get up at around 12 and work during the afternoon 'till my partner returned from work, have an evening with her 'till she went to bed around 11, then back to work 'till whenever – possibly four or five in the morning. The engine for *Batman* was a huge task that took three months of solid work before I got stuff on the screen. All the code was from scratch. There was so much to do, the masking part was only a tiny bit of it, a short routine. Much harder was the sorting system to decide what depth each item was. As was the system to scroll the images to the correct alignment – remembering that there were eight pixels per byte and an image could be in any of four alignment positions and [that] I didn't want to store four copies of each graphic. Even once I had the graphics running there was the complication of mapping all the rooms to use the least possible amount of space, using bit streaming so not one single bit was wasted."



» [ZX Spectrum] This location's exit is reached by jumping from a huge 'S' dropped on a scary dog.

As Jon's coding progressed, gameplay elements evolved such as the requirement for essential abilities to be collected alongside power-ups, while regular playtesting highlighted necessary gameplay refinements. "I just made it up as I went along, no pre-planning at all. I would come up with ideas for puzzles and throw them into the game and then try them, adjusting gradually until they felt right. I would watch friends play them and make adjustments if I felt they had been too hard. I did learn to keep dexterity puzzles separate from thought puzzles after I spotted people were thinking their way through a puzzle but then deciding they must be wrong because they had lacked the dexterity to do it. I had decided on what Batman would be able to do and just thought it would make the player feel they had achieved more if they had to earn each ability. The power-ups were not essential but could provide shortcuts."

Jon's approach to *Batman*'s graphics was to give Bernie a framework within which he could let his imagination run wild. Characters had to be one-third head, one third body, one-third legs, and objects had to fit required dimensions. "I think the one-third method really came from the 'Budweiser' character, there was so much character in the face and if we had gone for something more approaching normal proportions the face would have only been a few pixels across.

ISOMETRIC ODDITIES

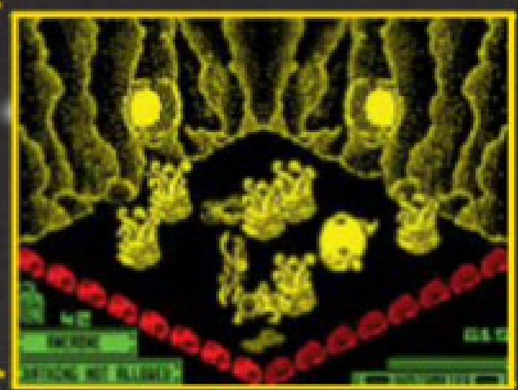
Other isometric titles with quirky casts



Q*BERT

■ SYSTEM: Arcade
■ YEAR: 1982

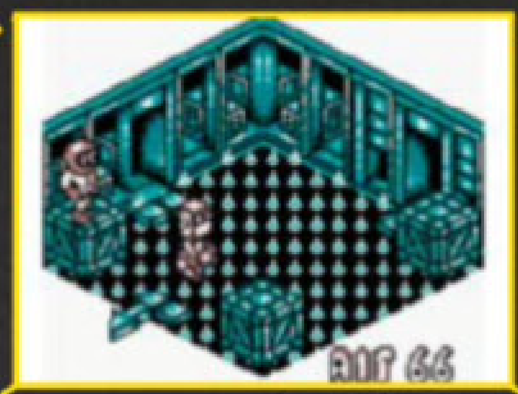
One of gaming's earliest isometric efforts – and the first to feature weird creatures. *Q*bert* places a strong emphasis on the strange from its Esher-inspired attract mode onwards. Starring a sweary, orange, big-nosed ball on legs, this classic's central premise of changing the colour of pyramids remains as infuriatingly addictive as ever.



HYDROFOOL

■ SYSTEM: Spectrum, Amstrad
■ YEAR: 1987

Sequel to the bizarre *Sweevo's World*, *Hydrofool* sees Gargoyle's robotic dogsbody draining a huge aquarium. Naturally, Sweevo rusts as he swims around his environment, but discarded oilcans remedy this condition. While performing his aquatic duty, Sweevo fights jellyfish and rescues gnomes.



ALTERED SPACE

■ SYSTEM: Game Boy
■ YEAR: 1991

No strangers to the format – having developed the fantasy-themed NES title *Solstice* the year earlier – Software Creations' subsequent isometric project retains the tricky puzzles and dexterous challenges of its predecessor but has a Sci-Fi B-movie vibe! Cue robots seemingly built from tinfoil-covered boxes and rubbery-looking aliens.



ISOLATED WARRIOR

■ SYSTEM: NES
■ YEAR: 1991

Defunct Japanese outfit KID's isometric forced-scrolling shooter is noteworthy for its strange alien soldiers. These minions look ordinary, however, when compared to the game's outlandish bosses. This challenging title's more curious mayors include an ancient titanic cyborg and a massive tentacled brain.



HAUNTING STARRING POLTERGUY

■ SYSTEM: Mega Drive
■ YEAR: 1993

In addition to a poltergeist protagonist the household objects in EA's game become frightening and decidedly odd monsters when possessed. Polterguy has to scare a family stupid by making sofas grow huge mouths and vacuum and transforming coffee tables into giant spiders.



BIKER MICE FROM MARS

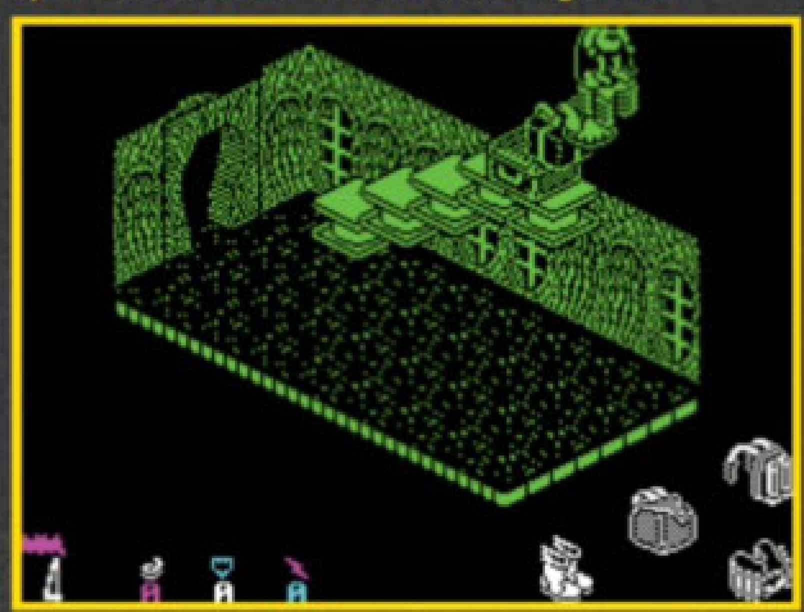
■ SYSTEM: SNES
■ YEAR: 1994

Konami developed numerous videogame adaptations of the mousey heroes in the Nineties, but they never expected these games to sell purely on their licences. So while this high-octane racer's curious cast includes mice on motorbikes, a thug on a motorised insect and a huge man driving a ball the title's gameplay is solid.

» [ZX Spectrum] Finding this area's hidden Batcraft part requires three teapots and a question-mark bowling ball.



» [ZX Spectrum] Stacking this area's items and jumping upwards from their summit accesses a higher level.



We realised early on that we could have a greater range of objects if we didn't worry about scale. The method of [superimposing] one picture over another was a faster version of [Bernie's] scribble method, he just wanted the mess to suggest something to him. I gave him rules about the sizes of objects and that when he drew things they should fit the size given as closely as possible, apart from that, he was given freedom to do whatever he felt like. Bernie was a perfectionist, he could spend an entire night moving one pixel trying to decide what looked best."

In terms of influences, Bernie cites Sixties art, comics legend Neal Adams and a musical background as inspirations for his *Batman* visuals. "I was a great fan of Neal Adams, but it would be fair to say that a Batman Annual from the Sixties featuring some great imagery – [such as] Batman running across the keys of a giant typewriter was as much an influence. I was never a conventional artist – [I was a] Jazz / Punk musician with a habit of doodling. Jon knew I had no formal education in the field [but had] an imagination with a comedy / horror sensibility. We both knew we had something stunning compared with the competition."

> **"I would come up with ideas for puzzles and throw them into the game and then try them"**
> Jon Ritman

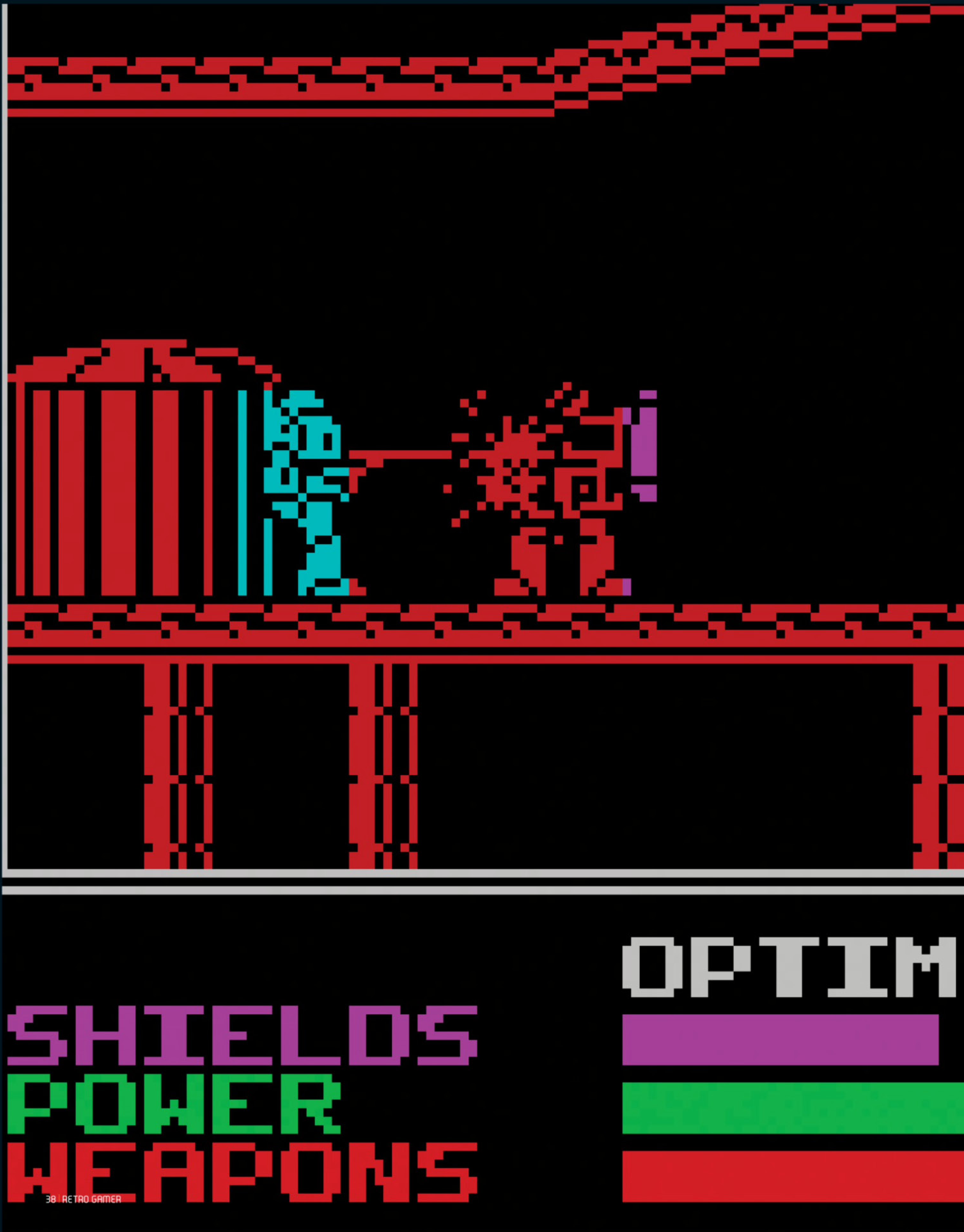
As Jon explains, Bernie's art intentionally excluded bitmap versions of *Batman*'s villains despite two featuring in the title's plot alongside Robin. "The plot was written without my input and I probably didn't see it 'till the game was finished, [*Batman*'s villains] were never part of our vision for the game. Anyway, once you have a villain you would have to use him in some sensible way that covered the entire game, in that environment I have no idea how I would have achieved that. We had thought of having [Robin] randomly appearing very, very rarely, so only say one in a hundred players saw him and then they would never be believed, but [we] never got around to it."

Omissions aside, once *Batman* was completed it still required DC's approval. DC asked Jon to make it clear that Batman didn't take drugs, however, Jon substituted a Batcraft for the Batmobile purely for technical reasons. "[DC Comics asked] me to change the term 'Bat-Pill' [that] I had used in the blurb, so I changed it to 'Bat-Power'. There was certainly no talk of the Batmobile – I don't remember any restriction. I think we chose the Batcraft as it meant we could design anything we wanted."

Jon's final thoughts are on *Batman*'s difficulty, how proud he is of the game and a memory of spare memory that makes him smile. "It was too hard near the beginning but barring that I am very proud of it. As for additions, when it was finished I discovered I had 14 bytes left on the Spectrum. I used those bytes to hack the graphic of Batman standing still so that it looks like he is tapping his foot when you leave him for a while – I think every review mentioned it." ★

Thanks to Jon Ritman, Bernie Drummond and Jon Woods for sharing their memories.




OPTIM
SHIELDS
POWER
WEAPONS

The Transformers

RETROREVIVAL »

SO MUCH LESS THAN MEETS THE EYES



» ZX SPECTRUM » DENTON DESIGNS » 1986

***The Transformers* is arguably 15 of the worst minutes you can ever have while gaming.** The idea behind it was conceptually sound, and there's no denying that the ability to transform has a certain appeal, but the end product was a disappointing mess of a game that came nowhere near the high standards of Denton Designs' other releases.

The game itself is relatively straightforward: you simply use the five Autobots to roam around the ugly looking levels in search of the four missing pieces of the Energon Cube. In addition to being able to transform, each Autobot has the ability to fly, which enables them to move faster, but stops them from firing at Decepticons. This last point is something of an issue as the Decepticons come thick and fast, and can easily knock down your precious energy, forcing you to use another of your remaining companions.

Another issue with the flying is that it suddenly makes contact with the ground extremely dangerous, instantly destroying you if you hit it. It might be an alright game if the controls were a bit better, and it didn't suffer from collision detection, but unfortunately it does, so you'll spend most of your time running through the game instead.

While the ability to transform was pretty cool for the time, it added very little to the actual gameplay, being little more than a gimmick, a cool one admittedly, but one that bought very little to the table. And that's perhaps the biggest problem with *The Transformers*, it simply didn't deliver on its undeniably cool premise. *



OPERATION THUNDERBOLT

What's better than one submachine-gun? Two of course! Just ask Chuck Norris. Martyn Carroll blows the lid off Operation Thunderbolt, Taito's explosive sequel to Operation Wolf

Everyone fondly remembers *Operation Wolf,* Taito's arcade gun game from 1987. It was one of the most popular coin-ops of the era, with gamers eagerly feeding it coins for a chance to annihilate some baddies and become an action hero. But just how popular was the game? Was it the top-performing coin-op of 1987? It's almost impossible to say for sure due to the lack of firm figures. Rumour has it that demand for the game caught Taito by surprise, forcing the Japanese firm to bulk order extra memory chips to keep the cabs rolling off the production line.

But we do have a little more than folklore to go on. Chiefly, *Operation Wolf* was a ubiquitous sight in arcades everywhere, with the cab usually positioned near the entrance, so that visitors could gawp at the imposing cab with its mock submachine-gun bolted on in front of the screen. If you were playing the game, gripping the recoiling gun like the infant son of John Rambo, you would almost certainly attract onlookers (who might have even shouted advice like "Don't shoot the nurses!", or "Shoot the coconuts!"). Now if only there were two guns so a second player could battle alongside you… ▶



PIXEL PERFECT

The art of Operation Thunderbolt, extracted and exposed





BOSS RUSH These guys won't go down like regular cannon fodder

THE RUSSIAN



■ This heavily-armed guard looks like a close relation to a similar foe in *Operation Wolf*. He shows up at the end of stage four (and midway through stage six on higher difficulty levels) and blasts you with his Gatling gun. He's wearing a bulletproof vest so only head shots count.

THE GENERAL



■ The local militia leader tries to block your exit from the enemy HQ at the end of stage six. He fires a flurry of rockets that deals lots of damage, so hit him rapidly with your own grenade rockets. In two-player games he's able to sustain double the amount of damage before dropping.

THE HIJACKER



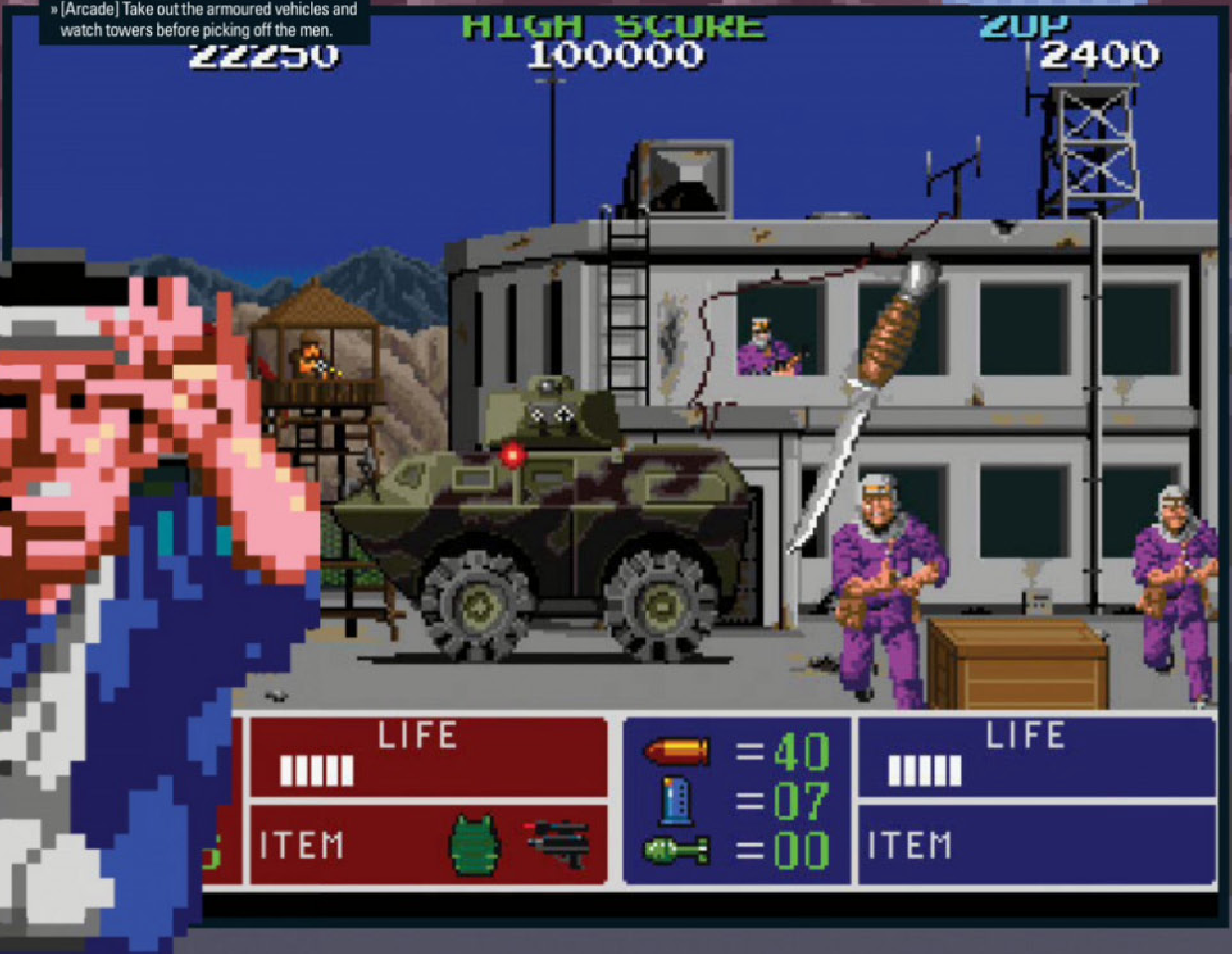
■ The chief hijacker stands between you and your escape. You don't want to use grenades as this will injure the pilot and fast-track you towards the bad ending. Wait for the boss to open fire and then quickly try to get in as many shots as you can. Accuracy and speed are required.

> **"Operation Thunderbolt took the tried and tested route of taking what worked first time around and multiplying it by two"**

▶ Another sign of the game's popularity was that Ocean Software, the UK's biggest software house at the time, snapped up the rights and released home versions in time for Christmas 1988. The conversions were generally excellent, surpassing expectations (particularly on the 8-bit machines) and scoring Ocean a Christmas number one. Yet perhaps the biggest sign of the game's success was the speed in which Taito deployed the follow-up. *Operation Thunderbolt* was released in Japan in December 1988, barely a year after the original's debut, and then it popped up around the rest of the world in early 1989. Given the repute of *Operation Wolf*, both in the arcade and at home, the sequel was hotly anticipated. In Europe it debuted at the ATEI (Amusement Trades Exhibition International) show in January 1989 where it was tipped to be one of the year's biggest coin-ops alongside Taito's own *Chase HQ*, Atari's *Hard Drivin'* and Williams' *NARC*.

Operation Thunderbolt took the tried and tested route of taking what worked first time around and multiplying it by two. There were many more enemies for a start, with soldiers and combat vehicles literally filling the screen and attacking you from all angles – it was relentless, making *Operation Wolf* look like *Desert Bus*. There were more stages too, and some ended with boss battles against heavily-armed super soldiers. The most obvious doubling-up, though, was the addition of a second character. Roy Adams returned to liberate hostages but this time he was assisted by his Green Beret buddy, Hardy Jones (no kidding). Of course, this meant that two guns were now welded to the front of the machine. As a result the new cabinet was 25% bigger than *Operation Wolf*, adding more to the cabinet's 'hell yeah' factor.

In two-player mode you took on enemies together, although an enjoyable competitive element was present. At the end of each stage you could compare each other's hit rate to determine who was the best shot, but the real fun was had in the thick of the action



» [Arcade] Take out the armoured vehicles and watch towers before picking off the men.

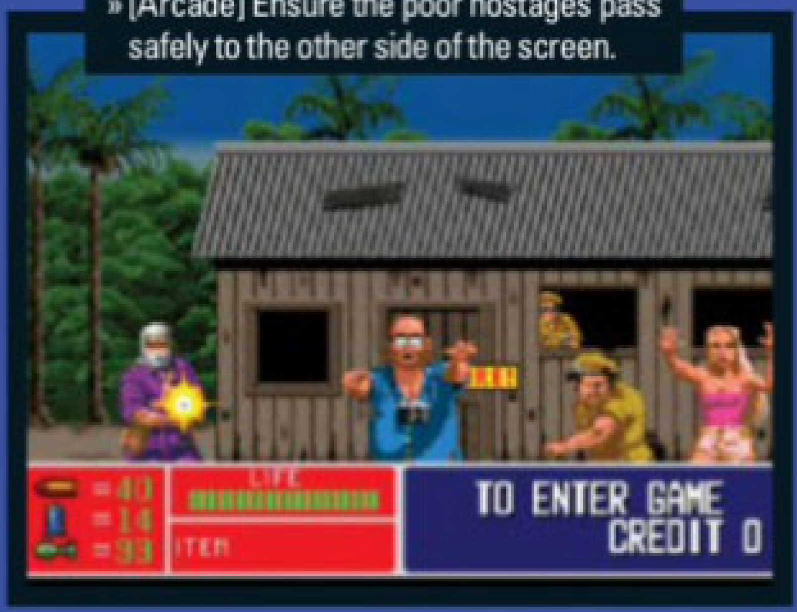

» [Arcade] Now this is just ridiculous – enemies and bloody *After Burner* to contend with.


» [Arcade] The old dangling from the ceiling trick. Brace yourself boys, you're coming down with a thump.

when supplies such as ammo, health, bulletproof vests and so on were at stake. A supply crate would either parachute into play or you'd have to blast an unfortunate animal that darted across the screen, at which point both players would try and be the first to bag it. The item would whiz towards the player who shot it first, but if the other player was quick, they could shoot it and make it travel in their direction. Hence impromptu games of ping pong would break out as players fought to claim vital supplies.

Besides the two-player option, the other main addition was the introduction of 3D-style stages. *Operation Wolf* just scrolled left or right, but now, alternating stages moved 'into the screen', with Roy and Hardy running headlong into battle or travelling on vehicles. This added more urgency to the proceedings as you'd want to shoot enemies before they could get up close and open fire. Visually, the perspective was a bit wonky but movement was rather smooth. While *Operation Wolf* ran on a 68000 system, the sequel used the same arcade board as *Full Throttle*, Taito's turbo-charged racing game that preceded *Chase H.Q.*.

Operation Thunderbolt looked impressive in the arcade but the mix of scrolling and 3D sections, coupled with the intensity of the on-screen action, made the home conversions a challenge. To no surprise, Ocean secured the rights and lined up the game as one of its big prospects for Christmas 1989. Ultimately, the versions for the Spectrum, Amstrad CPC and Commodore 64 struggled to do the coin-op justice in the same way that the *Operation Wolf* conversions had. The 16-bit Atari ST and Amiga versions were much better, being closer to the coin-op source. Taito itself produced a SNES version several years later which was sadly far from perfect.



» [Arcade] Ensure the poor hostages pass safely to the other side of the screen.



» [Arcade] The race to secure extra legroom seats quickly spiralled out of control.

The third game in the series, *Operation Wolf 3*, didn't arrive in arcades until 1994 and by this time other developers had muscled in with their own rival games. These included Sega's *Line Of Fire*, SNK's *Beast Busters* (which upped the ante with three guns) and Namco's *Steel Gunner* (the sequel to which was made available as an *Operation Thunderbolt* upgrade kit). Taito also released the sci-fi-flavoured *Space Gun*. Compared to these games *Operation Wolf 3* was curiously devoid of thrills, reverting back to the static, shooting gallery game that *Operation Wolf* so successfully reimagined. A far more enjoyable third sequel, entitled *Operation Tiger*, arrived in 1998 and provided a decent, modern update of the familiar hostage rescue situation we were familiar with. The game cannot currently be emulated, so the final entry in the series is definitely the most obscure.

For the fans of *Operation Thunderbolt*, Taito released a more fitting follow-up in 1989 – and yet it didn't even feature a gun controller. The POW rescue scenario of *Operation Wolf* was clearly based on the second *Rambo* movie, so when the third film hit cinemas Taito quickly grabbed the rights and produced the official arcade game to the film. While the playable characters (Rambo and Colonel Trautman) were shown on screen and controlled using standard joysticks, *Rambo III* was very much the next iteration of the *Operation* series, featuring a mix of scrolling and 3D scenes – and not forgetting outlandish levels of over-the-top action and a staggering body-count which went into the thousands. *

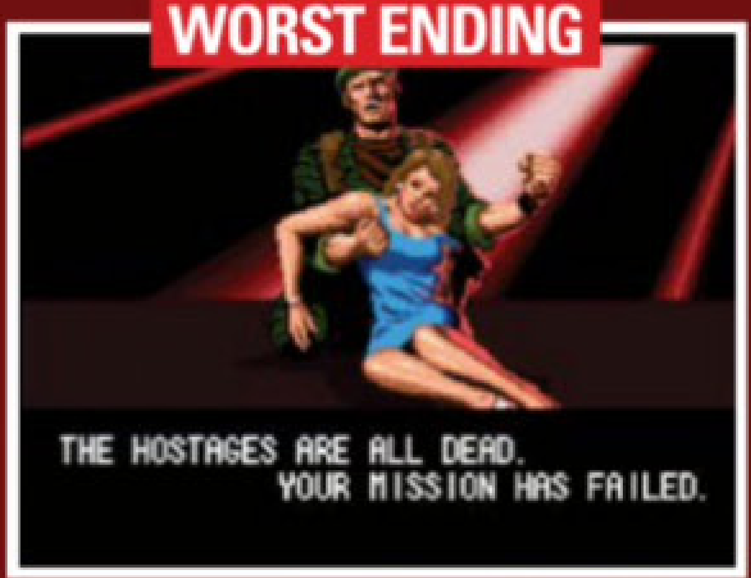


» As per usual, Ocean's home versions were adorned by striking Bob Wakelin artwork.

ENDGAME

How will this perilous mission pan out for you?

WORST ENDING



■ Your mission comes to an abrupt and tragic end if you fail to save at least one hostage on stage four or stage six. Even if you have credits in the bank, it's game over.

BAD ENDING



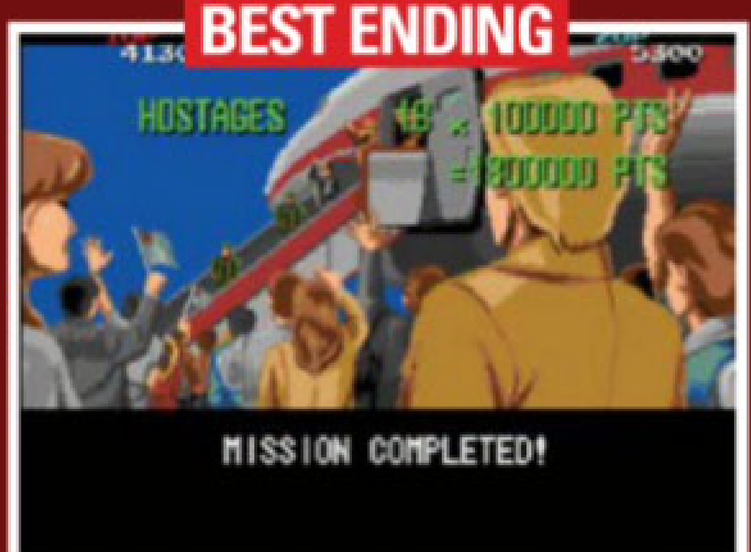
■ If you reach the cockpit on the final stage and accidentally kill the pilot being held by the hijacker, then there's no-one to fly the damn plane home. Back to the start for you, soldier.

GOOD ENDING



■ A successful mission! You managed to defeat the hijacker without capping the captain so you can all fly out of this hellhole and return to the USA where a hero's welcome awaits.

BEST ENDING



■ To get the best possible ending you must defeat the hijacker, save the pilot and bring home all 18 hostages. For completing this feat you'll earn a bonus of 1.8 million points.

CONVERSION CAPERS

The home versions of Operation Wolf were generally well regarded, but how did the follow-up fare?

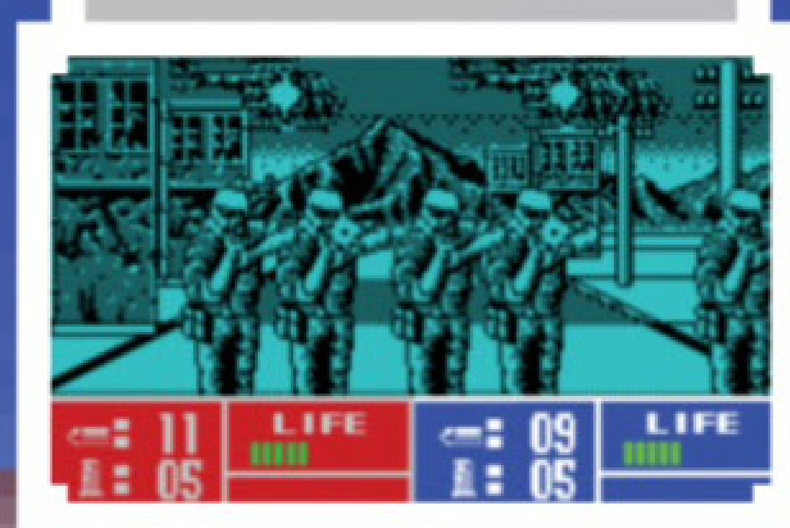


COMMODORE 64

■ The full story behind the C64 version probably deserves its very own article. In short, the original version of the game was scrapped after several months of development and some of Ocean's finest had to step in and turn out a releasable game in just a few weeks. Different teams worked on the 2D and 3D sections concurrently, so the end result was a patchwork affair, but it was playable and it did at least resemble the coin-op. It's a curious mystery as to why *Zzap!* magazine awarded it 92% in a review featuring screens from the earlier, scrapped version.

ZX SPECTRUM

■ Expectations were high when Ocean revealed that Andrew Deakin and Ivan Horn, the pair that successfully brought *Operation Wolf* to the Spectrum, were teaming up again to convert the sequel. The end result was disappointing, largely because they upped the enemy count to ridiculous levels. Right from the off you were facing several choppers and an enemy platoon – all at once! The result was an almost impossible challenge and while it was technically impressive, the screen was so busy it became a monochrome mess. Ocean's Cabal conversion, released at the same time, was the better bet.





"Impromptu games of ping pong would break out as players fought to claim vital supplies"



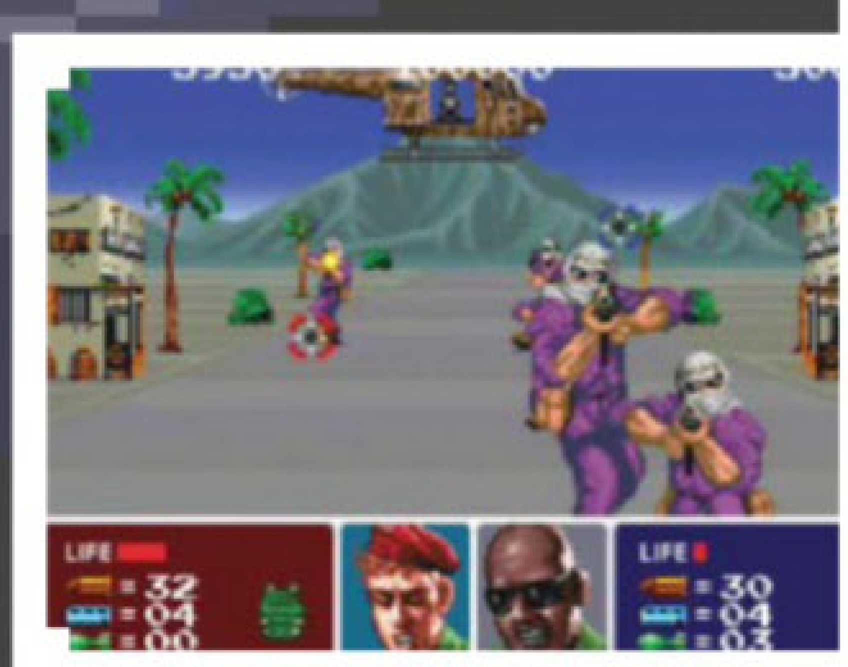
AMSTRAD CPC

■ Developed alongside the Spectrum version, the CPC version was predictably similar but it did benefit hugely from the colour graphics (providing you weren't a green screen user!). You could actually see what you were shooting for a start. Like all of Ocean's *Operation Thunderbolt* conversions, the game suffered from having a tiny, almost invisible gun-sight which made targeting enemies difficult (the laser-sight upgrade should have been the default gun-sight). At least the developers had the sense to include a level skip cheat so you could reach the later stages.

COMMODORE AMIGA

■ This was almost identical to the ST version, and as such it was joy to play, particularly when using a mouse to aim. On closer inspection you'd notice some subtle Amiga-only additions. In 3D sections there were extra objects such as the roadside bushes on stage one, for example. The improvements were minor but they were enough to single out the Amiga release as the best version of *Operation Thunderbolt* released at the time.



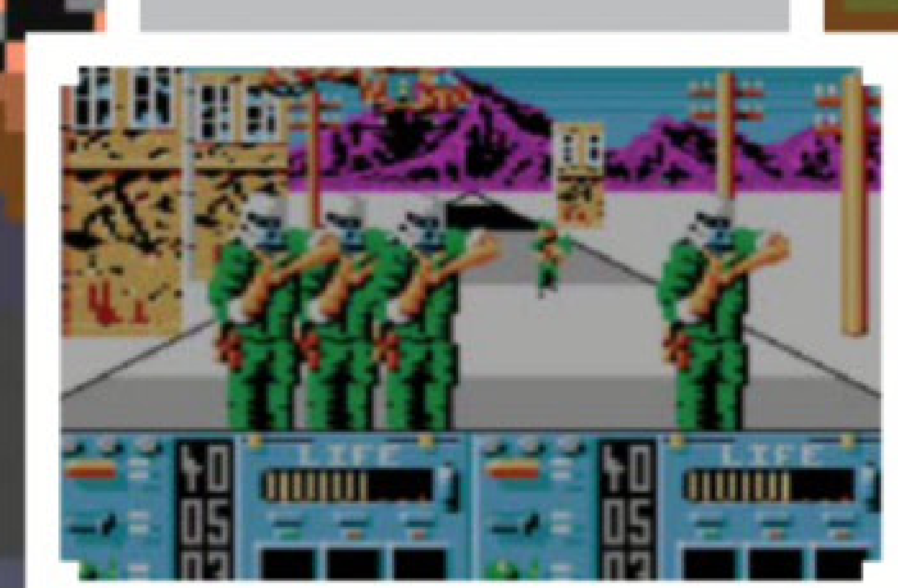


SNES

■ What prompted Taito to release a version for the SNES in 1994, almost six years after the coin-op's debut is anybody's guess. It did sport some enhancements, though, such as a fleshed-out backstory and the ability to choose from six different soldiers. The core shooting game was unchanged, however, and it lacked the speed and smoothness of the coin-op. In its favour it did include support for the SNES Mouse and Super Scope.

AMSTRAD GX4000

■ The Amstrad cartridge games were a series of missed opportunities and *Operation Thunderbolt* was one of the most regrettable. This was the same game as the existing tape/disk version only with more on-screen colours thanks to the Plus range's expanded palette. This should have been an improvement but it actually resulted in a rather drab display compared to the standard version's vibrant colours. Ideally the developers should have gone back and redesigned the game around the Plus hardware, using its sprite capabilities to produce a far more fluid and faithful version.







ATARI ST

■ John Brandwood (code) and Rob Hemphill (graphics) did an great job of bringing *Operation Thunderbolt* to the 16-bit machines. The presentation was spot on, featuring the arcade intro (enlivened by a new Jonathan Dunn tune), sounds and sprites grabbed directly from the coin-op. The graphics were downsized slightly and the scrolling in the 3D sections lacked the original's smoothness, but overall this was a fine conversion. It also added improvements, such as the jeep bouncing up and down on the road in stage three and the water reflections in stage five.



PC/PS2/XBOX

■ If you wanted an arcade perfect version of the game you had to wait until 2005 and the release of *Taito Legends*. The compilation included *Operation Thunderbolt* and a further 28 titles from Taito's catalogue including *Operation Wolf* and *Space Gun*, plus classics like *Bubble Bobble* and *New Zealand Story*. The emulation was generally faultless and the only noticeable thing missing was light-gun support (although you could use the mouse to aim on the PC version). For shooting games, though, it was possible to fine tune the analogue settings.

JOHN MEEGAN

The ex-Ocean coder reveals how he helped rescue the C64 conversion



Operation Thunderbolt **sounds like one of the more 'eventful' conversions. Can you explain what the situation was?**

Ocean's Gary Bracey had hired a programmer named Trevor Brown on the basis of a 3D Atari ST demo. Trevor was at a loose end for a couple of months after his hiring so he was allocated *Operation Thunderbolt* on the C64. This was problematic as Trevor had no C64 experience, or of writing in assembly, or of the convoluted dev tools chain that Ocean used back then. He was given the source code for all the essential components including multiplexers and scrolls by Paul Hughes. Paul also spent a considerable amount of time telling Trevor how all these elements worked. Unfortunately, against all advice he decided to hardcode set raster splits to allow bigger sprites on screen. The problem was that the sprites couldn't move vertically. He had made sequencing attacks impossible. He never tackled the issue of 3D sections or how to make a vaguely convincing 3D movement on screen. I think the expression for this is an 'omnishambles'. It became obvious to Gary that Trevor was out of his depth. In fairness to Gary, he wanted to give poor Trevor time to turn it around. Unfortunately Trevor was the wrong man in the wrong job.

It sounds like a horrible nightmare! So what happened next?

The project was reallocated to myself, Paul [Hughes], Rich Palmer and Steve Thomson with the direction was to get it finished as soon as possible. I did the quasi-3D stuff. It was six weeks of unrelenting misery as I remember it. On one occasion I woke up from under the desk covered in ants. New programmers like to romanticise about pulling all-nighters but it was hellish.

Were you able to salvage anything useful from the aborted version?

The code base was junk. There were kilobytes of target code that just did nothing. Gary found it almost impossible to believe none of it was useable. The graphics all had to be redone too, with maybe the exception of the title screen. The sprites were too big and had overlays that could never be used. Brian Flanagan was pretty gutted that all the graphics work he'd done to that point was discarded out of necessity.

Given the circumstances that you were up against, how satisfied were you with the finished version of the game?

I think for six weeks of hard work everyone did as good a job as you could expect in that given time. All of the parts looked decent and it played well enough.

Did you get a bonus for digging Ocean out of this particular hole?

Yes. It was hell, but a lucrative hell.







RGT

Retro Gamer Travels

LOST IN TRANSLATION

How the rest of the world experienced your favourite games



» [PlayStation] The most infamous line in *Revelations: Persona* has become so well-loved among fans that it was retained for use in later versions.



» [PlayStation] *Revelations: Persona* featured an awkward translation which gave us some very strange lines.

RGT

MEGAMI IBUNROKU PERSONA

JPN ➔ USA
Japan ➔ USA

MEGAMI IBUNROKU PERSONA
Departing: 1996

FORMAT
PlayStation

DEVELOPER
Atlus

YEAR
1996

ORIGIN
Japan

LOCALISED FOR
USA

REASONS
Commercial

■ As a result of *Final Fantasy VII*'s runaway success, many of the PlayStation's Japanese RPGs are localised fairly sensitively and retain the original content, as publishers were more confident in the sales potential of Japanese RPGs. *Megami Ibunroku Persona* made it to North America as *Revelations: Persona* before that landmark release though, and the mangled localisation has made it the black sheep of a distinguished series.

Many of the problems stem from attempts to hide the fact that the game took place in Japan. Character portraits were redrawn to create more Western-looking characters, with most having their skin tones whitewashed (save for Masao, who became the African-American character Mark) and many receiving altered hairstyles. The names of towns, characters and Personas were altered to fit too – for example, Eriko, Yuka and Kei become Ellen, Alana and Nate. The job was half-hearted though, leaving Shinto shrines and other obvious artefacts of Japanese culture behind, including very noticeable voice clips that are repeated regularly in battle. Beyond that, the game contains a rather poor translation which features numerous editing issues, including infamous lines such as "Mark danced crazy!"

The gameplay doesn't escape unscathed, either. The American version has been made easier than the original by decreasing the enemy encounter rate, weakening the enemies themselves and awarding more experience per battle. Worse yet, the Snow Queen quest – an optional but major story thread which offered several hours of gameplay – was completely removed from the game.

The changes made in *Revelations: Persona* would go on to affect the North America's version of *Persona 2: Eternal Punishment*. While the game was a far more faithful product than its predecessor, a number of characters from the first game reappear and Atlus was mindful of the established naming conventions.

When *Persona* was given a PSP remake in 2009, the localisation was redone from scratch. The new game was much closer to the Japanese original, featuring an unaltered difficulty level and the Snow Queen quest. There was almost no trace of the original localisation, save for a couple of dodgy lines from the original retained for comedy value. While the PlayStation version is still enjoyable, we'd recommend the PSP game over it – not only is it a more faithful representation of the original game, it's the only version to have seen a UK release.





ECONOMY

RGT BIOHAZARD

JPN ➔ ROW
Japan ➔ Rest of the World

BIOHAZARD
Departing: 1996

FORMAT
PlayStation

DEVELOPER
Capcom

YEAR
1996

ORIGIN
Japan

LOCALISED FOR
Rest of World

REASONS
Substances

■ *Resident Evil* is a fairly famous case of international censorship, with a lot of the Japanese version's most graphic imagery removed in international releases. Much of this comes in the game's introductory FMV. As the voiceover discusses the various murders which have taken place near Raccoon City, the Japanese version shows corpses which are replaced in the international release with newspaper headlines. We then see the STARS team investigating the area, and poor old Joseph finds a gun being gripped by a severed hand – which isn't quite apparent outside of Japan, thanks to some discretionary zooming. He's then attacked by a zombie dog, a sequence which suffers heavy cuts to remove all shots of biting, as well as the dog being shot to pieces and a look over Joseph's corpse.

A couple of other scenes were also cut. The iconic cutscene when you meet the first zombie is also altered to remove a shot of Kenneth's half-eaten head dropping to the floor. Additionally, Chris Redfield's smoking habit is excised from both the intro and an ending. While various versions have claimed to be uncensored, the only one to contain all the FMV completely uncut is the 1997 PC release, which also restores colour to the intro.

JPN



» [PlayStation] Joseph's demise at the teeth of the zombie dog is shown in graphic detail in Japan.

ROW

» [PlayStation] Look how lazy this is. The new footage of Chris not smoking is poorly placed over the original FMV.

ECONOMY

RGT DOUBLE DRAGON III: THE ROSETTA STONE

USA ➔ JPN
USA ➔ Japan

DOUBLE DRAGON III: THE ROSETTA STONE
Departing: 1990

FORMAT
Arcade

DEVELOPER
East Technology

YEAR
1990

ORIGIN
USA

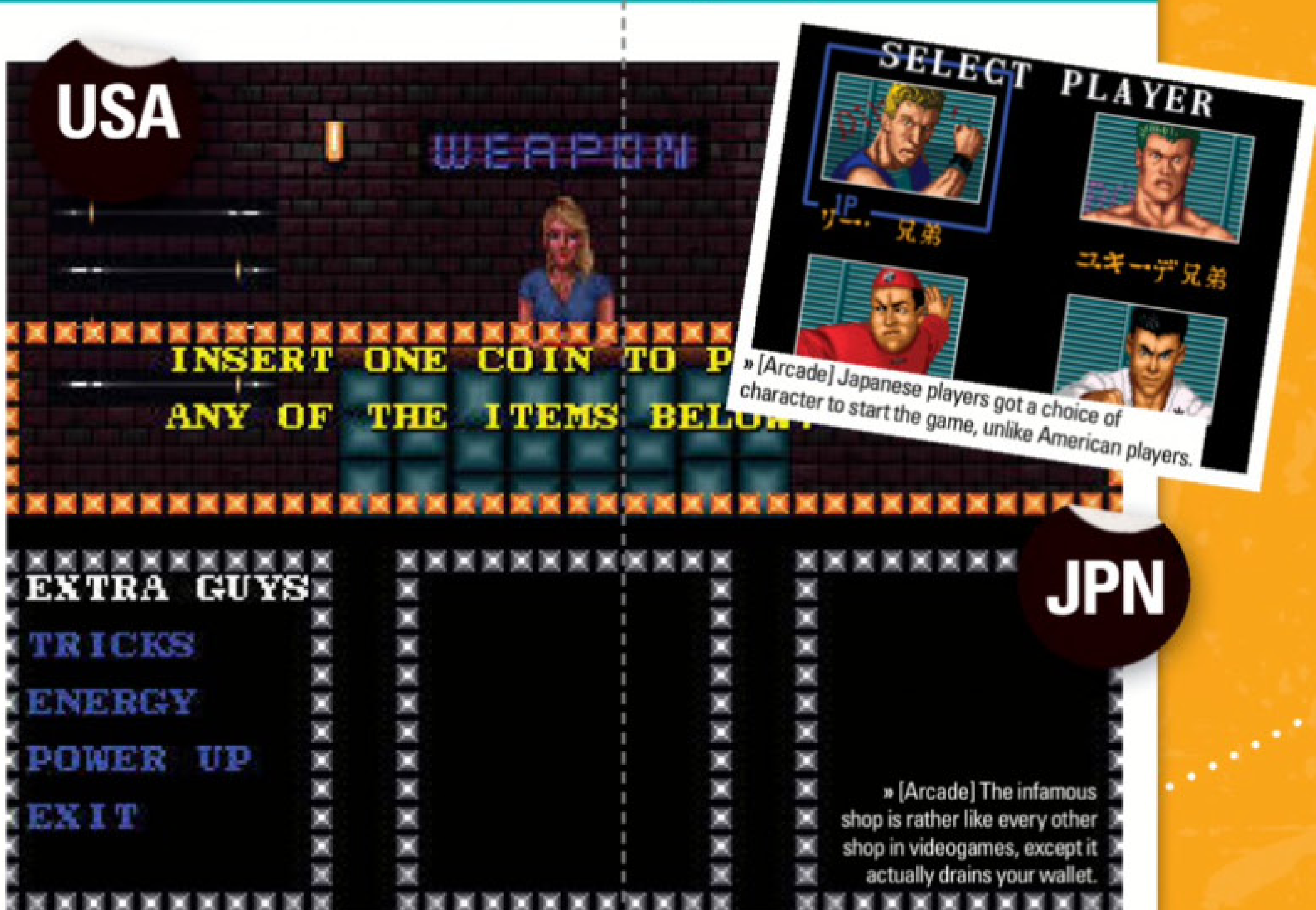
LOCALISED FOR
Japan

REASONS
Commercial

■ So here's an odd one – a game developed in Japan, which was released in the USA first and then was localised for the domestic audience. It's fair to say that the original version of the game was an enormous cash grab. The big, innovative feature in *Double Dragon III* was the inclusion of a shop, from which you could purchase weapons, more health, new moves, and even additional playable characters that functioned as extra lives. This all sounds great, but each purchase cost a full credit! This microtransaction model is common in modern gaming, but it was truly shocking at the time.

The game's director Yoshihisa Kishimoto has been open about the fact that players hated this feature, and the entire concept of an item shop was removed from the Japanese version as a result, requiring some adjustments. The extra characters were now selectable at the start of the game, and additional moves were available by default (although harder to perform). Meanwhile, weaponry was strewn around the floor of each stage as in previous games. With no need to pressure players into buying upgrades, the game was also made easier, with enemy attacks dealing less damage in the Japanese version.

USA



» [Arcade] The infamous shop is rather like every other shop in videogames, except it actually drains your wallet.

JPN

» [Arcade] Japanese players got a choice of character to start the game, unlike American players.

ECONOMY

RCA Studio

The RCA Studio II, an obscure Seventies console long glossed over in the annals of video game history, gets an exclusive origin story by Retro Gamer's Marty Goldberg that you certainly will not want to miss



II

The RCA Studio II has to be one of the more unique and interesting consoles for us to write about. Not just because it was only on the US market for about a year, sandwiched in between the Fairchild Channel F and Atari Video Computer System, but because of the new found respect for this console that tracking down its origin history provided us, a history that has never been presented before, until now.

The origins of the Studio II present themselves in a time in history when there was a movement in the electronics industry towards pursuing the next big thing in computer technology. We're talking about the idea of shrinking the CPU of large mainframe and minicomputers down to a small IC chip called a microprocessor. It was being done out of the desire to pursue the next generation of computer driven devices for the consumer market, which included the march towards microcomputers. While it sounds like common sense, the notion of being able to shrink computers down to a size for the classroom, or even for the home, was revolutionary at the time.

Electronic component companies like Intel and Fairchild Semiconductor had started research in the late Sixties and were soon joined by the large consumer electronics companies that had research divisions such as RCA. RCA itself had been releasing mainframe computers since entering the field under the direction of RCA general manager, David Sarnoff, in the late Fifties. Becoming one of the 'big eight' manufacturers of computers during the Sixties, it was only natural that it joined in the electronics arms race for the miniaturization of the computer. RCA's high tech charge into the field was lead by Joseph Weisbecker.

Joseph Weisbecker had obtained his Bachelor Of Science in Electrical Engineering from Drexel University in 1956. Joseph was interested in computer technology for educational use from the beginning, designing things such as a *Tic-Tac-Toe* computer out of relays and several grade school educational aids using lights and switches. In 1956 he found himself in an internship with RCA installing its first commercial computer, the RCA BIZMAC (a large $4 million computer composed of 25,000 vacuum tubes). Upon graduation he joined RCA and became a member ▶





INTERVIEW WITH *Forrest* *MacGregor*

We take a closer look at the creation of the RCA Studio II

How did you get involved at RCA?
In 1976, I graduated from Appalachian State University in Boone, NC with a degree in Industrial Arts and Computer Science. I had made a special study of microcontrollers, which were just emerging. As luck would have it, I applied at RCA Distributor and Special Products Division in Swannanoa, NC, and they were excited to find someone with formal training in micros. First job out of college for me, they promised that they would employ me in a videogame project, but it wasn't quite ready to start so for several months.

How was production done at RCA, considering it was the first videogame system it had created?
It was made on a human intensive assembly line of 125 or so mostly women. Chips were hand inserted, as were discrete components. Everything was wave soldered except a few wires. Board cleaning was in an ultrasonic degreaser using Freon TF. (I have a good memory.) Production rates were 1000 units a day on a single shift. Three or four adjustment/troubleshoot stations were in the line for rough testing of the RF components. We had a small cartridge with a test program for the console that put different patterns on the screen, tested the keys, beeper, expansion slot.

Considering its brief production, what were some of the signs on your side that the Studio II wasn't doing well and how did production wind down?
Units piled up in the warehouse and never did sell briskly. Competitive product from Fairchild and Atari were color, high resolution, sound-via-TV stuff wtih joysticks, so the monochrome block displays and keypad-only UI were outclassed from day 1. After 6-8 months, units were made available to employees at a discount. Eventually, RCA saw the writing on the wall, abandoned software development and the Studio 3, and shut it down. Inventory was sold to Radio Shack for 10 cents on the dollar.



» RCA Studio II team from left to right: Walt Stobbe, Dave Callaghan and Bill Stonaker.

of the small team that developed RCA's first transistorised computer, the RCA 501, which he also coded a series of test and measurement programs for. Between the 501 and being co-architect of RCA's 601 system, Joseph had been gaining the foundation and experience he would put into good use for the design of his microprocessor years later. In fact, he was becoming a person who was able to predict coming trends, such as the time when he saw the move to mini-computers in the Sixties and proposed that RCA start planning its own, speccing out a system incorporating a low cost dot matrix serial printer, ROM subroutine storage, and combination projector-CRT display. RCA ignored his idea, and would continue to churn out large mainframe computers for the rest of the Sixties before exiting the market in 1971.

One area of Josephs's research RCA didn't ignore, though, was his research into the future applications of Large Scale Integration (the process of fitting thousands of transistors on a single chip) during the early Sixties, which was a time when the idea of integrated circuits was still very new, and the industry was still struggling to fit hundred of transistors on a single chip. It lead to him being a consultant on future products for RCA for much of the rest of the Sixties, besides designing unique I/O and storage systems for RCA's mainframe computers.

FRED (Flexible Recreational And Educational Device) is really what became the genesis of the RCA Studio II. Conceived in 1970 as a full microcomputer system based around a custom of the to be created microprocessor, encompassing all of Joseph's advanced LSI research, its first incarnation was the System 00 built in 1971. FRED/System 00 called for the FRED microprocessor, (8-bit single chip) along with 64K of RAM (DMA access), a cassette tape based storage system, a gravity card reader, small keyboard for input, and a standard TV set as a display for the output. As Joseph wrote in a 1972 memo, "FRED is an exciting new consumer product possibility. For the first time, a full power electronic computer could be available at the price of a Hi-Fi system or color TV. Every home and classroom is a potential customer."



Joseph had a TTL (transistor-transistor logic, the same technology early video arcade games were based off of) based prototype of the microprocessor completed in 1971. Formally designated the COSMAC microprocessor in 1972, the full FRED prototype was completed that year, and its unique reduced instruction set architecture is considered the grandfather of today's RISC based microprocessors. Small changes include FRED's keyboard being realised as small 16-position keyboard, and a low-resolution black and white dot matrix TV display system that was chosen for both flexibility and low cost.

Work on software began that very year, too. Joseph's own vision for the software was for a complete computer suite including "a collection of programs that will demonstrate the power of [its] hardware in entertainment, education, and utility applications. Games, stimulants of artistic flair, simple drill-type learning programs, and calculator functions are included."

As 1973 rolled around, the tech world around Joseph seemed to be changing, and he seemed to find himself in direct odds with it at times. Joseph's vision was to make computer power available for the masses by making it affordable. It was a vision not unlike the one Jack Tramiel would summarize over a decade later as, "computers for the masses not the classes." The problem was, the microprocessor 'arms race' had now begun and everyone was chasing more and more powerful chips against making microprocessors for a lower cost.

As Jack summarized in a later internal article at RCA, "There is no shortage of ideas for using computers, but there are no computers with a mass-market price tag. For widespread home and school use, the price of a free-standing, self-contained computer system should be well under $500. This is the price level for colour TVs, quality audio systems, home-study courses, air hockey games, pool tables, one-week vacations, cheap electronic organs, and encyclopedias." He further illustrated, "Unfortunately, old habits are hard to break and we can also expect to see increased emphasis on [microprocessor] performance instead of cost."

The first fabrications of the low cost COSMAC had been completed towards the end of 1972 in a





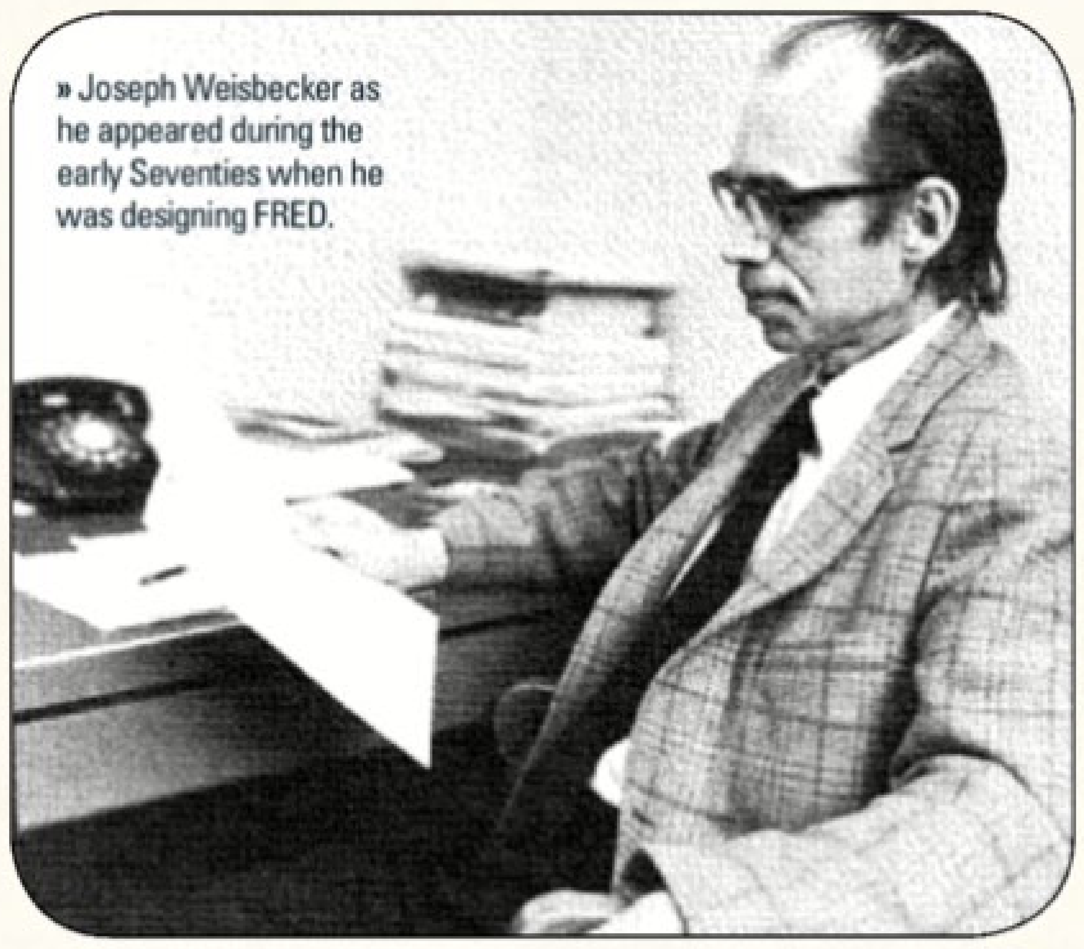
» We quite like the design of the RCA Studio II, even if it does look like some hi-tech telephone.

2-chip format that Joseph spent 1973 integrating into FRED as FRED2. Joseph and RCA set up a field test program with Random House, the New York based children's publisher and RCA subsidiary who at that time were the gold standard in elementary schools.

Random House helped define the creation of programs for reading and mathematics, and the entire process lead to the creation of the RCA Microtutor (a stripped down version of the $300 COSMAC based tutorial computer for learning the principles of microprocessors) the following year. In fact, most of the games and 'edutainment' software later available to the RCA Studio II were actually written during the 1973-1974 period. As Joseph noted at the time, "there has been no problem in motivating people to write game programs."

> "Towards the end of 1974, RCA now wanted to see about leveraging FRED for coin hardware"
>
> RCA becomes aware of the lucrative coin-op market

At a time when home games consisted of basic *Pong* style play that needed two players, the games being designed for FRED2 such as *Tic-Tac-Toe*, *Hexapawn*, *Twenty-one*, and *Space War* were able to use the computer as the opponent with a rudimentary, yet adaptable AI. "The computer learns to play perfectly only after a number of games have been played," stated Joseph in 1974. The entire offerings of games, had they been released as a commercial product at that time or the following year, would have placed a home entertainment product on the market that was miles above the Magnavox Odyssey and the forthcoming onslaught of *Pong* derivative consoles. Joseph and P.K. Baltzer coded most of these titles, and even Joseph's daughter, Joyce, joined in to help with her father's work.

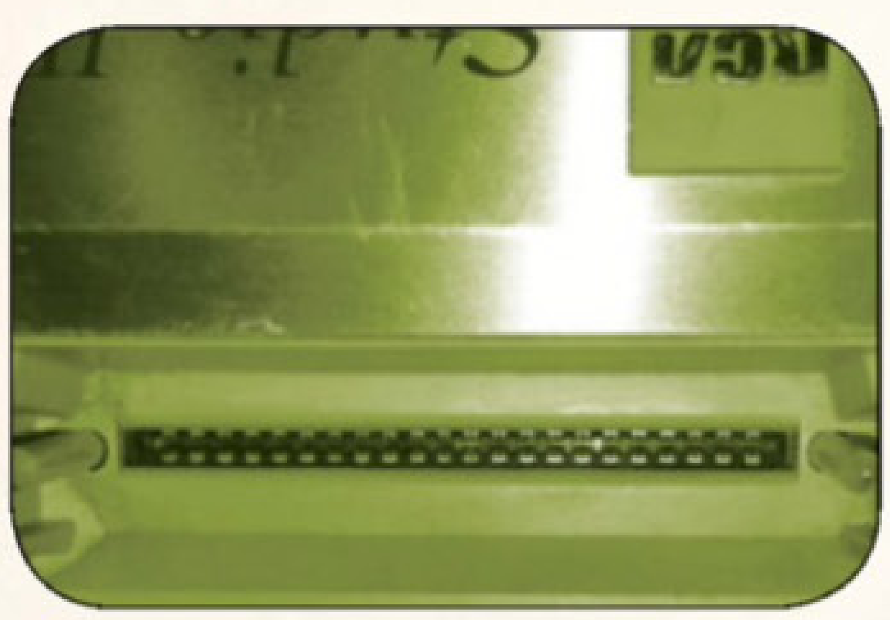


» Joseph Weisbecker as he appeared during the early Seventies when he was designing FRED.

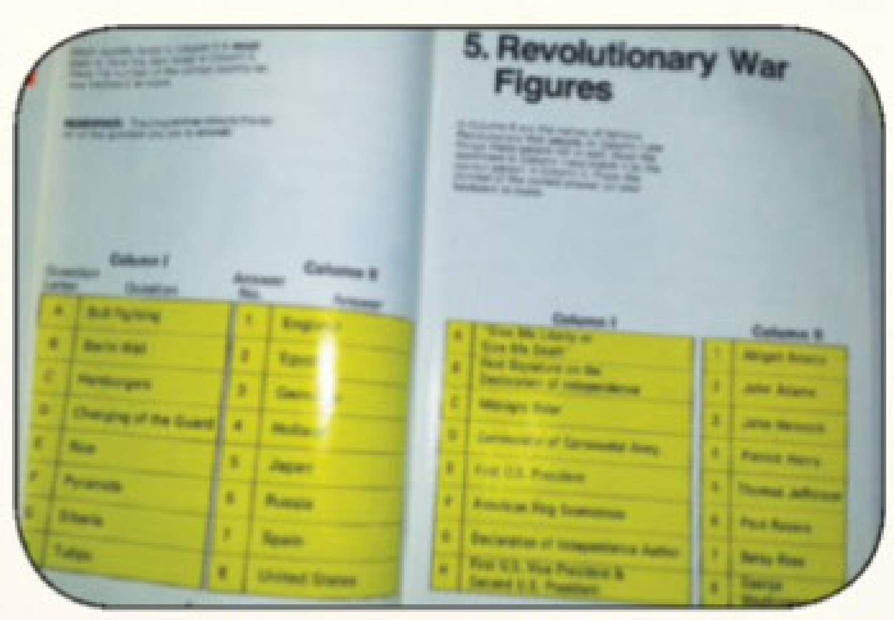
With the increased popularity of arcade videogames, RCA wanted to consider entering into this market too. RCA had been flirting with the medium ever since it been approached in 1969 by Sanders Associates and Ralph Baer in order to license the technology around Baer's Brown Box prototype to create a videogame console. Contracts were drafted and upon their completion in March 1970, Sanders decided to walk away from the deal, with Ralph later saying that the deal had been too onerous. One of the RCA team members left to became VP of Marketing for Magnavox, scoring the console for Magnavox and its historical 1972 release.

Towards the end of 1974, RCA now wanted to see about leveraging FRED for coin hardware. There was one minor change, however, the games would be in removable ROM packs. The prototype would be completed in 1975 and moved to testing at several malls in the New Jersey area. Ultimately RCA decided not to get into the coin-op business or license it, but had it been released it would have provided switchable games almost a full six years before the Japanese DECO cassette based system was unveiled. The one positive thing to come out of those tests, ▶

» Like many early systems, the RCA Studio II used cartridges for playing its games library.

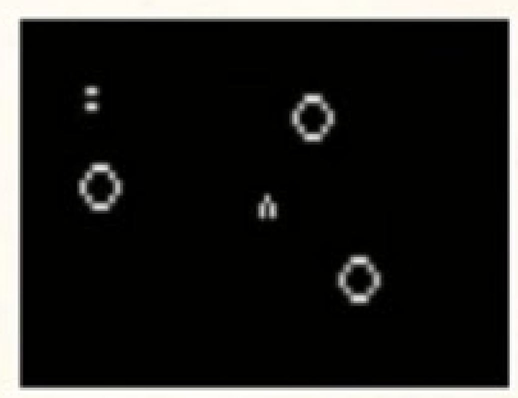


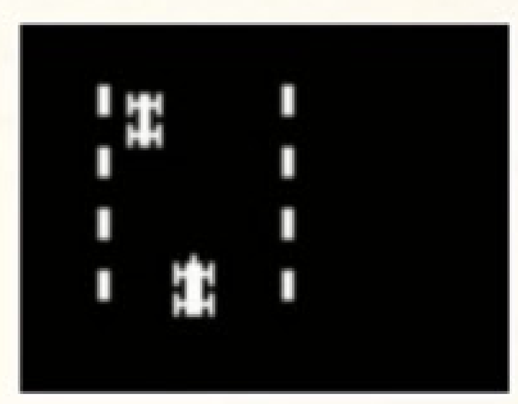


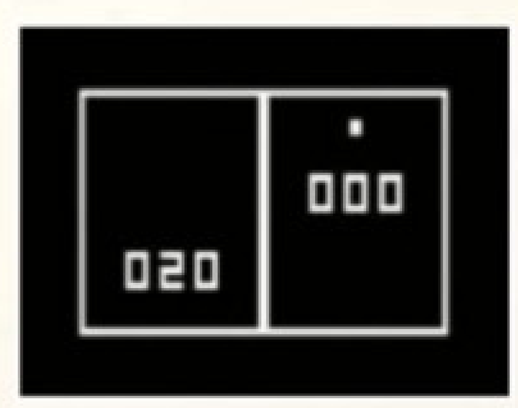


GAMES, GAMES, GAMES

- TV GREETING CARD
- ELECTRONIC 'ETCH A SKETCH'
- AUDIO-VISUAL
- DEMONSTRATOR
- TV ARITHMETIC DRILL
- WORD SPELLING DRILL
- WORD RECOGNITION TEST
- NUMBER BASE CONVERSION DRILL
- LOGICAL DEDUCTION TEST (21 QUESTIONS)
- NUMBER BASE CONVERSION DRILL
- TIC TAC TOE
- HEXAPAWN
- SLIDING BLOCK PUZZLES
- STATE CHANGE GAMES/ PUZZLES
- BOWLING
- MINIKRIEG
- TARGET SHOOT (OPTIONAL GUN)
- RACING
- ONE-ARMED BANDIT
- NETWORK GAMES
- TWENTY-ONE
- CELL MATCHING GAMES
- MAZE TRACING (INVISIBLE. CHANGING)
- RACE GAMES (AGAINST TIME)
- SPACE WAR
- NIM GAMES
- LIFE





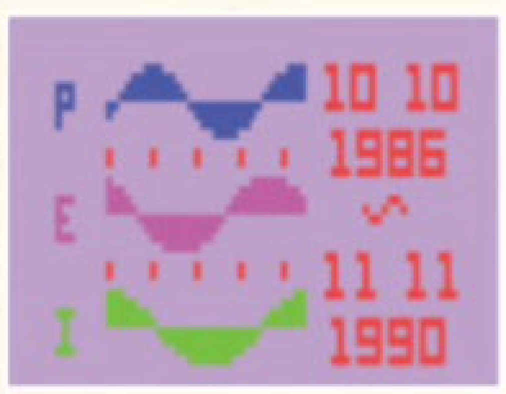


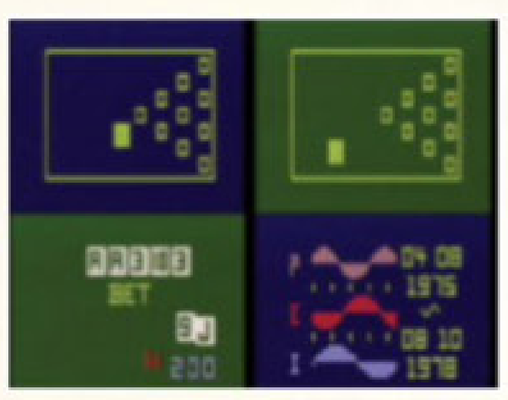


» Joyce Weisbecker and her sister operating the FRED2 computer. Joyce would also develop some of the early games.

however, was that it became obvious that the FRED technology combined with the new removeable ROM technology could be scaled for a programmable home game console. During the second half of 1975, several prototype FRED-based consoles were built into attaché cases for demonstration and field testing. It did well enough that a console project is formally proposed to RCA's Engineering/Distributor and Special Products Division (D&SPD) to create a console with a planned targeted release in 1976.

The Studio II officially started development in January 1976, with the mandate of taking the modified FRED design and creating an actual product out of it. The vision for the console still aligned with Joseph's original goals by bringing a programmable computer into the people's homes for a low cost. The team consisted of a talented and dedicated set of RCA engineers including Dave Callaghan, manager of engineering and responsible for all product development at D&SPD, including the Studio II, Bill Stonaker, who was responsible for the Studio II's digital circuit design, and Walt Stobbe, who was responsible for the Studio II's unique RF/power box.





The Studio II's design was timed just right to take advantage of the newly released single chip version of the COSMAC, the 1802, further lowering the cost of the console. Ultimately, RCA divided its product into three areas needed for any console of the time: the main unit, the switch box and the power supply. A problem with most of the *Pong* consoles at the time was that the controls were directly on the console or in the vicinity of it. This meant either sitting up close to the television or leave a trail of chords (for power and RF) from behind the system to wherever the players were sitting.

The team came up with a unique method for cutting down on cables by having a single power/RF cable go from the console to the switchbox connected behind the TV. The power supply is in turn plugged into the this RF switch box, and the entire system is turned on by sliding the TV output selector on the switchbox. The unique setup would also be leveraged about five years later for Atari's 5200 system which also didn't find success.

The Studio II was designed with keypads for input, which were in turn developed specifically by RCA's Deptford mechanical engineering group and purposely arranged in a touch tone telephone format for familiarity. Why keypads? In keeping with the unique keyboard input of the FRED, and already created program base, the team needed to support both gameplay and numerical/character input. That planned usage is also why the Studio II was billed as the Home TV Programmer on its release. Rather than create a multitude of controls, RCA felt the built-in keypads would provide a quick plug and play setup, low cost, and stand up to the pressures of the high excitement gameplay situations we have come to experience.

The FREDs display circuitry and DMA memory circuitry were productized as the RCA CDP-1861 video display generator, a custom IC that provides the Studio II with a black and white 32 x 64 dot display matrix. And while the FRED used audio tape in its casette player for sounds, the Studio II uses a 555 timer-oscillator circuit for generating its 'beep' sounds (which can also be shut off on the unit). Finally, five built in games were added: *Addition*, *Bowling*, *Doodle*, *Freeway*, and *Patterns*.

Completed by Fall 1976, the console went into manufacturing for a January 1977 limited release which was followed by a larger national release. With a list cost of $149.95 and cartridges at $14.95 each, it truly represented an affordable way for the consumer to enter into programmable consoles.



» An impressive closeup of the COSMAC Microtutor main unit. The main processing parts are on removable cards that dock in the empty slots shown.



» The COSMAC Microtutor kit, the first FRED-based product to reach the general public. Tested in schools by Random House, a 100 total were eventually produced.

FROM THE ASHES

The technology behind the cancelled full-color RCA Studio III was licensed by RCA to several manufacturers around the globe who built their own version of the console much like 3DO would be marketed from its beginnings almost two decades later. Released in 1978 -1979, these versions include:

TOSHIBA VISICOM COM-100

■ Released in Japan, the Visicom includes a more computer like look and detachable joysticks. It also uses a different cartridge format than the other clones around at the time, and as such, it has its own series of games.



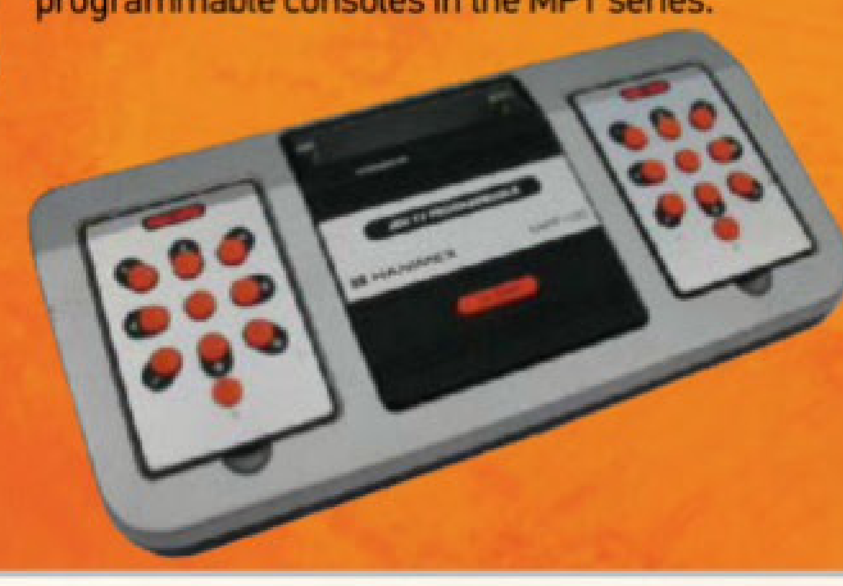


MUSTANG 9016 TELESPIEL COMPUTER

■ Released in Germany, this clone more directly resembles the Studio II in terms of visuals.

HANIMEX MPT-02 JEU TV

■ The French version of the console. The keypads are actually removable in this version of the system to allow easy holding in the hands. Hanimex also released several other programmable consoles in the MPT series.





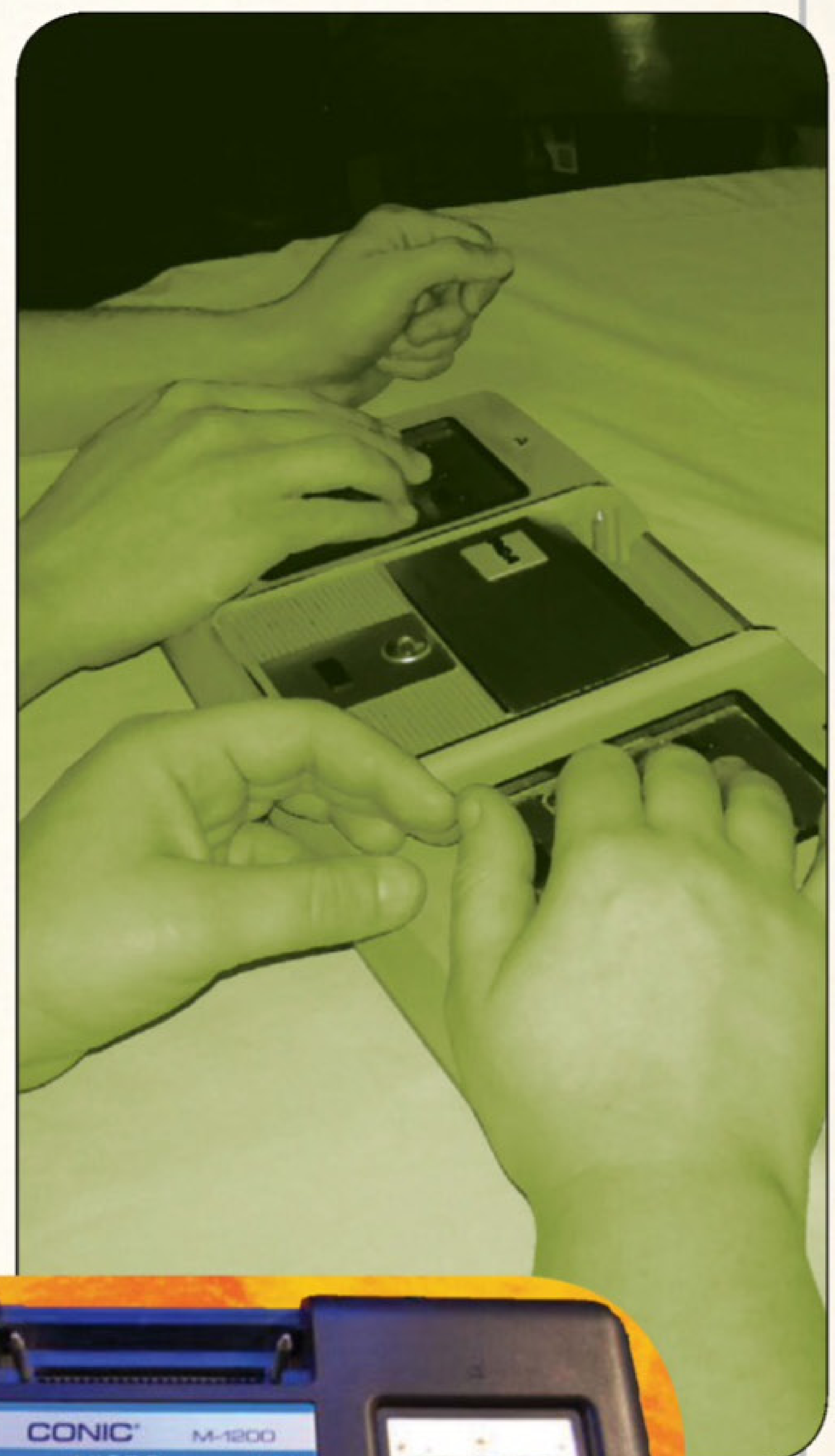
"After a disappointing Christmas, RCA announced in the spring of 1978 it was cancelling the Studio II"

RCA's dream was sadly short-lived

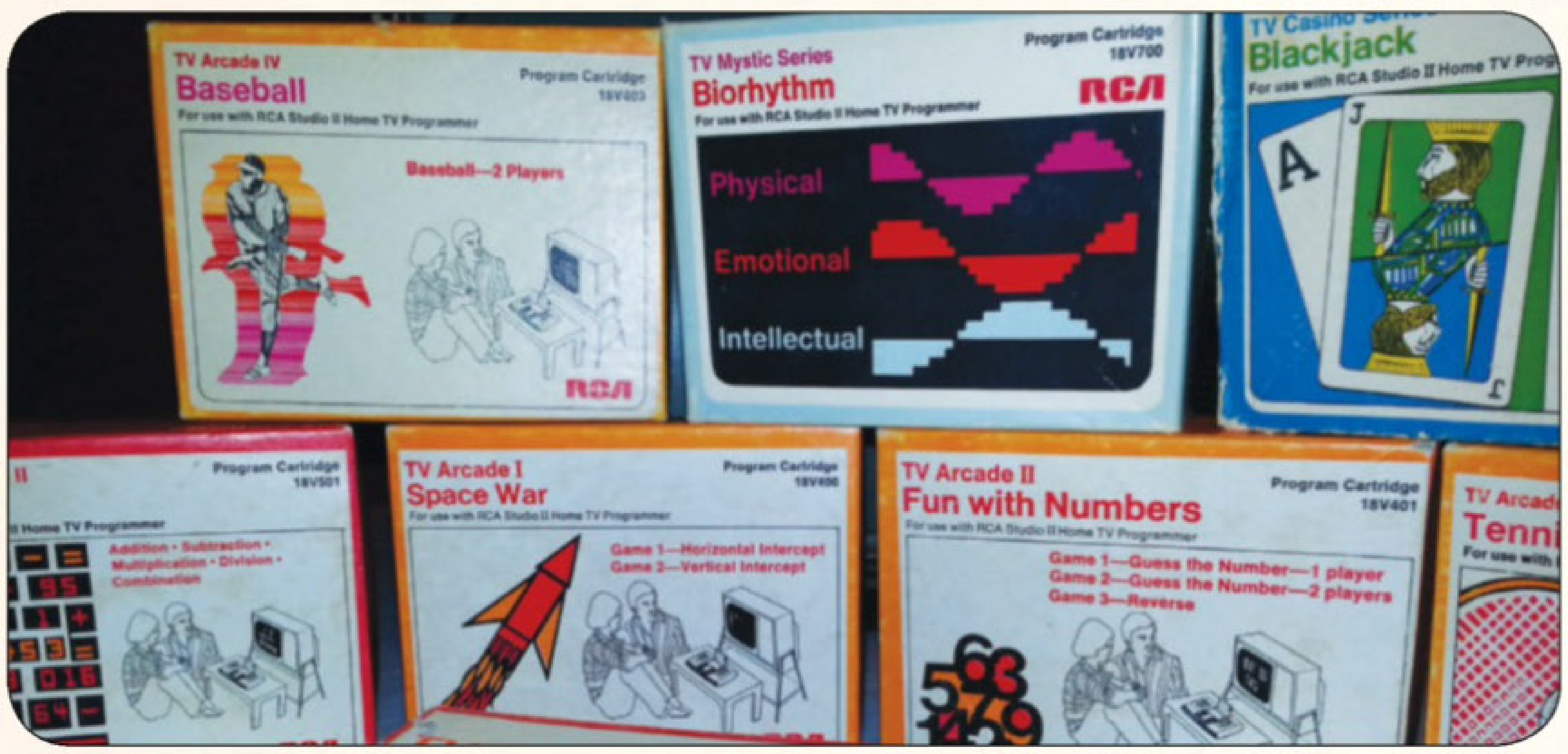
RCA was proud of its new console, trumpeting in late 1976 that the RCA Studio II "should offer the consumer a clear advantage over the subtle variations on the 'ball going back and forth' type of game that has been available for the past year or so." That wasn't exactly the case. You see, the problem was that it took so long for Joseph's technology to get to market that the console became sandwiched between the release of the two consoles that had essentially leapfrogged it in terms of technology: the Fairchild Channel F and the Atari Video Computer System.

After a disappointing Christmas, RCA announced in the spring of 1978 that it was cancelling the RCA Studio II. Work had immediately started on a full color version called the RCA Studio III which also included Joseph's new Chip 8 programming language, but the RCA Studio II's cancellation also put an end to this. However, the technology was licensed for use in Europe, Australia and Japan. Joseph's dream of low cost, affordable computing still lived on in the 1976 released COSMAC ELF, and 1977 released COSMAC VIP, and his work on FRED and its other variants would win several awards including the David Sarnoff Outstanding Achievement Award. Unfortunately, the RCA Studio II would sadly reach no such heights. The unfortunate console drifted off into relative obscurity it became an interesting footnote in video game history. The RCA Studio II was the only console of the period to start its life as a personal computer and then be scaled down to a console against the promise of upgrading to a full computer that the other late Seventies manufacturers were chasing at that point in time. *





» There are a number of multiplayer games available, but the playing area can make things feel crowded.



» The RCA Studio II catered for two sides of the market, offering fun games and educational ones.

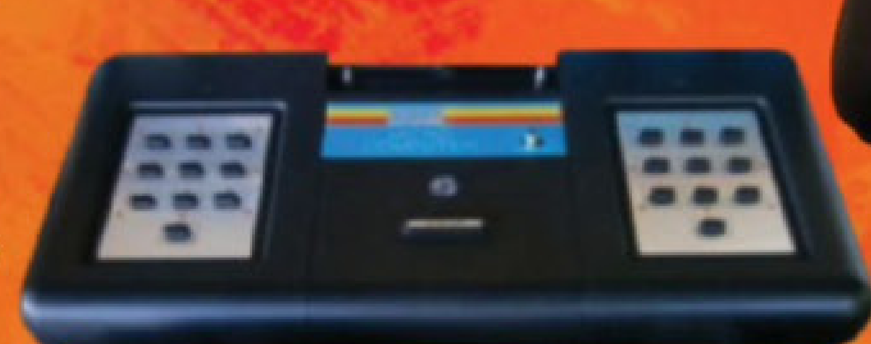


SOUNDIC MPT-02 VICTORY

■ Similar to the Hanimex model, the main difference is that it can use detachable joysticks similar to the type built into the Visicom.

SHEEN 1200 MICROPROCESSOR PROGRAMMABLE TV GAME

■ Also for the Australian market, this clone is basically the same as the Mustang.





CONIC M-1200 COLOUR

■ Produced for the European market by Conic, who released a series of pong consoles during the late 1970s. It again is derivative of the Mustang and Sheen versions.

CLASSIC MOMENTS

Disney's Aladdin

» **PLATFORM:** MEGA DRIVE » **DEVELOPER:** VIRGIN GAMES USA » **RELEASED:** 1993

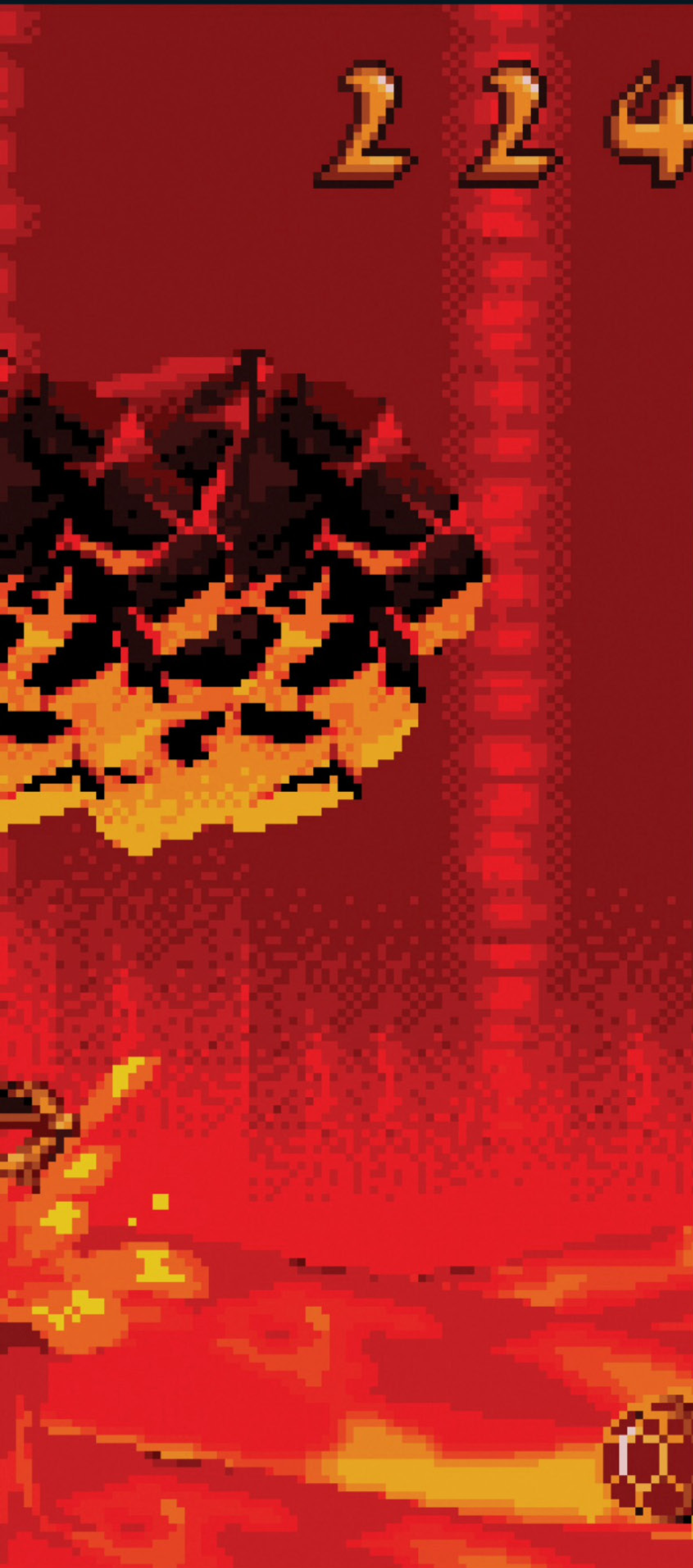
A*laddin* is the kind of game that teaches us a number of important life lessons. Firstly, it's possible to dispatch most pursuers simply by carrying a healthy supply of apples to throw at them. Secondly, you should watch your head in Agrabah because people are constantly chucking things from their windows. But most importantly, if you ever meet any supernatural entities, avoid making them angry at all costs. Get that last one wrong and you'll more than likely end up in a situation like this one, which comes about when Aladdin pinches the lamp from the Cave Of Wonders.

This daring escape is one of the film's most stunning scenes, and it proves to be one of the hardest levels in the game. As your carpet accelerates in order to avoid the wave of lava threatening to engulf you, you'll need to dodge enormous chunks of rock. Towards the end it's beyond a matter of reactions – if you don't know where you're going, a fatal impact awaits our hero. *



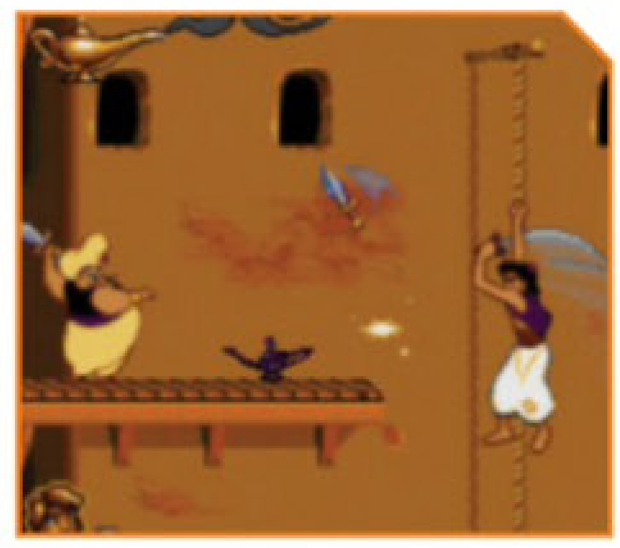
BIO

In the intense 16-bit console war, Sega and Nintendo would use all kinds of tactics to best one another – and one of Sega's best moves was to strike a deal with Disney to not only publish a game based on *Aladdin*, but to use its animators to make it look as authentic as possible. While that guaranteed a beautiful game, strong design was required to make it work. Luckily, Virgin Games' team, headed up the high profile programmer David Perry, was more than up to the task. The result was a classic platformer which received strong reviews and sold 4 million copies.



MORE CLASSIC ALADDIN MOMENTS

The Clash Of Steel



The first time you accidentally parry a throwing knife with your sword, you will think it's cool. The second time you do it, when you actually realise that this is a part of the gameplay, it's *really* cool. This neat trick becomes an essential survival skill as the game goes on, but that little rush of joy you get from each individual instance of skilful timing never goes away.

You Can Leave Your Hat On



When you come across this washing line in the desert, you might be tempted to dismiss it as a simple and unimportant bit of scenery. However, if you can position Aladdin so that it looks like he's wearing the iconic Mickey Mouse hat during the first part of his idle animation, an extra life will appear from nowhere. This is truly a magical kingdom!

Mindblowing Animation



Enemies all have their own humourous traits thanks to *Aladdin*'s incredible animation, but our absolute favourite is this skeleton. It stands up and looks confused, before realising that it has a bomb where its head should be. Don't hang around and stare at this for too long though – it's going to explode imminently, showering bones absolutely everywhere.

Wings Clipped



As you near Jafar's palace, Iago puts in an appearance as the game's penultimate boss, attacking you with barrels and summoning ghosts to hinder you. The evil sorcerer's squawking sidekick might be one of the most grating villains ever to appear in a Disney movie, so we are always glad to be given the opportunity to rough him up a bit.



FOXY MASCOT

In the late Eighties and early Nineties, mascots were becoming rather important for videogame companies. Mario had established himself at Nintendo and Sonic emerged in 1991 for Sega. So when Titus wondered how best to sell the 1991 game *Lagaf: Les Aventures de Moktar – Vol 1: La Zoubida* to an international audience ("we needed to find a global title for export", says Eric Caen), it was suitably inspired. Vincent Lagaf was a popular French singer and comedian and La Zoubida was one of his songs. It would have been too obscure a reference to sell outside of France so Titus seized the opportunity to make some use of the fox which adorned its logo, swapping the original game's Arabian man, Moktar, with a new character called Titus. As a side-scrolling platformer, it was hard not to fall for the charms of *Titus the Fox: To Marrakech And Back*. There were loads of cute enemies from bald-headed thugs to monsters that at first glance appeared to be trash cans and the game posed a serious challenge. It also looked amazing on every machine thanks to the skills of Francis Fournier and Stephan Beaufils. But why did Titus have a fox as its logo? "The fox is an animal with a solid reputation to be clever and always get in," says Eric.



Titus Software proved to be a wily old fox as it emerged from France to become one of the world's largest gaming companies. It shrugged off the critics, snapped up studios and left many others in its wake for 20 years. David Crookes talks to co-founder Eric Caen

TITUS SOFTWARE

In 2006, the French Minister Of Culture, Renaud Donnedieu de Vabres, sought to raise videogaming to the level of high art. He awarded the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres to Frédérick "*Alone in the Dark*" Raynal, Michel "*Beyond Good* *& Evil*" Ancel and Shigeru "no introduction needed" Miyamoto in recognition of their accomplishments.

A year earlier, Titus Software – the Paris-based global games developer and publisher with a history spanning 20 years – had filed for bankruptcy. Its latter years had been painful to watch as it produced not one, but two games that many considered to be the worst ever made. If game design was being put on a similar footing to existentialism and Impressionism, then Titus had – certainly in its later years – been threatening to relegate it to nothing better than a few early-man scribblings on a cave wall.

And yet Titus' founders – brothers Eric and Hervé Caen – deserve much credit for their role in gaming. Under their watch, Titus became one of Europe's largest developers and publishers, and at its height, it employed 700 people – 550 of them programmers, designers and artists. In Eric, they had an enthusiastic and accomplished programmer. In both, they had managers with relentless drive and ambition.

Eric created his first game when he was 15-years-old, in the second half of 1981. His debut was a port of *Octopus*, the Game & Watch title that had players gathering as much gold as possible while attempting to avoid a set of life-sapping tentacles. Caen's version was created for the Commodore CBM 3032, the successor to the Commodore PET ("I wrote it entirely in 6502 Assembler," he tells us), and it whet Eric's appetite so much that he went on to convert the 1982 Sega arcade game *Pengo* to the Oric-1, a machine so popular, it had a six-month wait in France.

Eric's passion for videogames began to take over his life. He would code long into the night, honing his skills but neglecting his schoolwork. Although this ultimately ruled out a university education, it put him in an ideal position to set up a company, so at the age of 19 and with the help of his brother, EH Services was born. "It was a development company for hire which we created in April 1985," Eric says.

EH Services created educational software and games for home computers such as the Thomson TO7 and the Exelvision EXL 100. Based in Le Raincy, a commune in the eastern suburbs of Paris, the company took on Jean-Charles Meyrignac and Gil Espèche, who had authored the book Oric Atmos: Vos Programmes BASIC Et Language Machine.





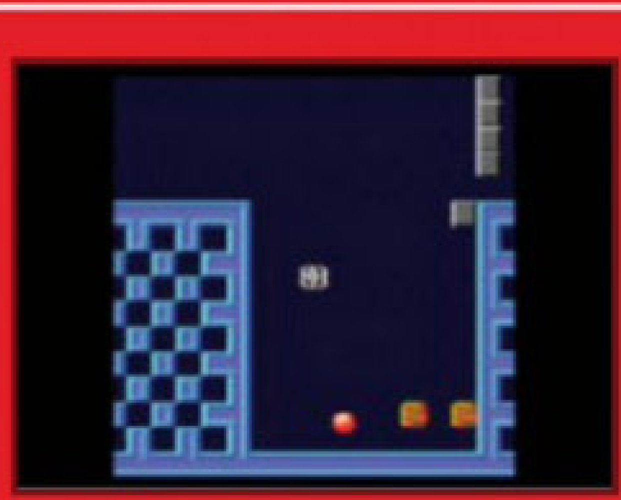


DEFINING GAMES



Crazy Cars 1988

This was a visually impressive, speedy driving game inspired by Sega's arcade hit *Out Run*. Set in the US, the Amiga version on which it originated had six stages – Arizona, Florida, Space Shuttle, Mountain, Malibu and New York. Bumps in the road would send vehicles bouncing into the air and crashes would dramatically – and frustratingly – slow your car, the generous time limits and general easiness ultimately meant the game could be mind-numbingly dull.



Titan 1989

The CPC was an important machine for Titus given Amstrad's huge success in France. *Titan* was one of the best early games for the computer as *Arkanoid* and *Breakout* influences combined into an infuriating, fast-scrolling puzzler. The player used a cube to control a bouncing ball in an attempt to destroy the bricks spread across 80 levels and coder Philippe Parnard used a special technique to extend the screen area into the CPC's usually unusable borders.



The Blues Brothers 1991

With Titus having acquired *The Blues Brothers* licence, it set about making a marvellous platform caper which perfectly captured the characters and feel of Dan Aykroyd and John Belushi's creation. Set to glorious renditions of the band's music which we remember from the film – from *Soul Man* to *Everybody Needs Somebody To Love* – the game had ladders to climb, umbrellas to break falls, boxes to throw, and a number of fierce dogs to combat.



Prehistorik Man 1993

The success of *Prehistorik* led to an inevitable sequel, once again starring a humorous cartoon caveman. The game was Titus' final commercial release for the CPC. It was also one of the few non-cartridge games to make use of the Amstrad Plus's extra graphic and sound capabilities, pushing it close to 16-bit in looks. Although the game was also given a DOS release, it achieved success on the SNES to which it was ported in 1995 as *Prehistorik Man*.



Robocop 2003

Robocop was released in 2003 and it was Titus' last game before it went bust. If it was a last-ditch attempt to turn its fortunes around then it failed and it shows only that the company had learned very little from the debacle that was *Superman 64*. This was a first-person shooter that was broken from the very start and each of the long missions were an awful chore. It was almost laughable as enemies walked through walls and bug after bug presented itself.

The company also employed Alain Fernandes who had written a game called *L'Ete Sera Chaud* for the Oric-1. Alain had unsuccessfully touted it to developers. Loriciel, but it had brought him to the attention of Eric who, lived in the nearby commune of Montfermeil.

The newly formed group created titles such as *Apprends-Moi à écrire* for the Exelvision, and *Des Signes Dans l'Espace* for both the MSX 1 and the Philips VG 5000. The games were published by other companies but later that year, the Caens decided to change direction. "We'd had a positive year with EH Services," says Eric. "But we wanted to work on our own games and Titus became our publishing brand."

With EH Services developing games and Titus publishing them, the Caens had greater control over their output. But the early days of Titus was a particularly tough time for the developers. In order to get the company up and running, the Caens needed to quickly build a solid portfolio of games. "The ambition was to get a maximum number of games produced in a short space of time and the quality was not important," recalls Jean-Charles. "I was able to convert games within a single month of work, so I converted more than ten games for them."

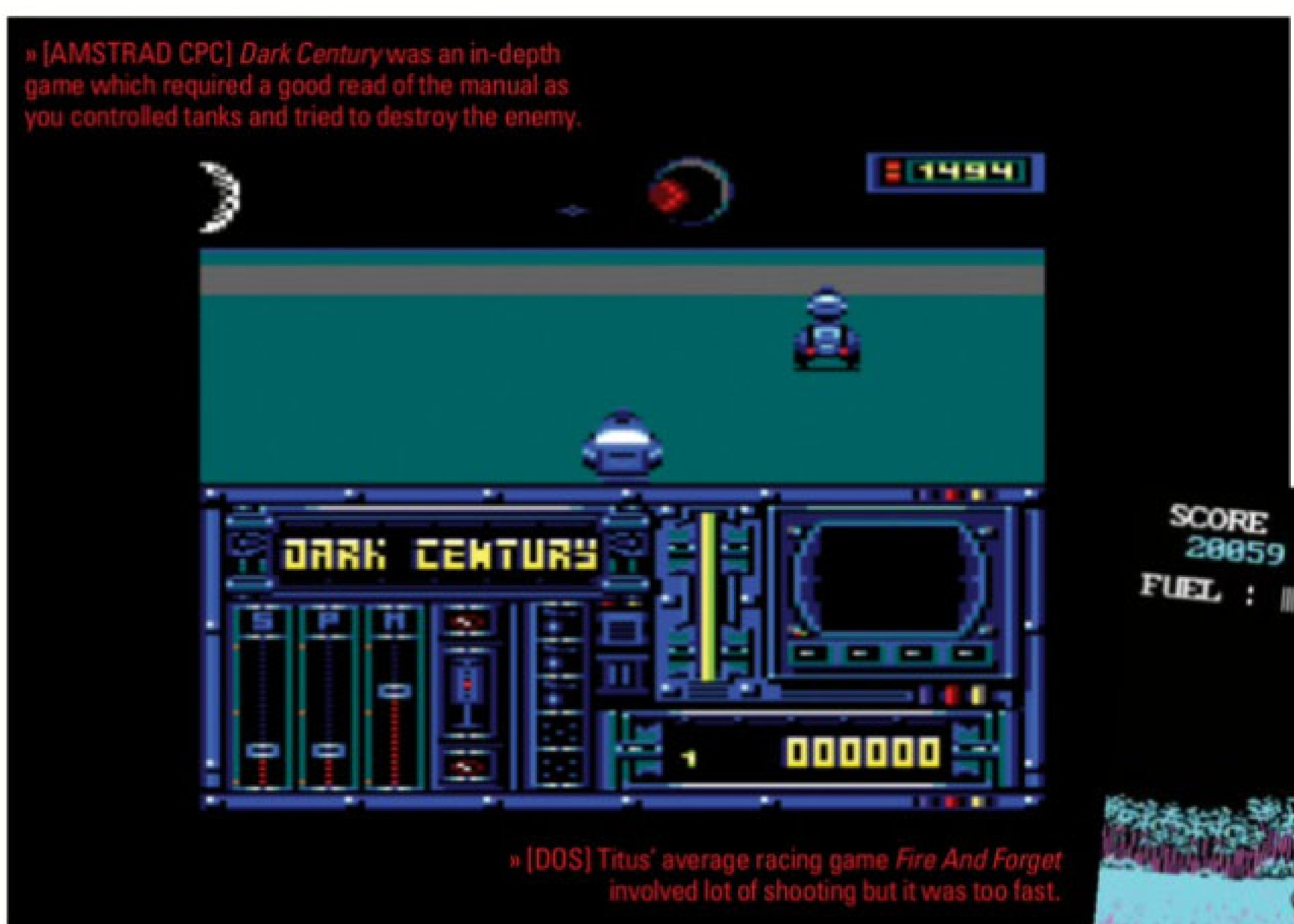
In order to maximise revenue, Titus also wanted its games released on as many different platforms as possible. The developers had to quickly learn the ins and outs of the various computers they were expected to work on, often having just a day or so to get their heads around the architecture before producing their own game-making tools and getting on with the task in hand. Alain would later claim to have programmed games for more than 20 computers during his five-year spell at Titus, and, although it helped the company to early sales of some £66,000, the workload inevitably caused some strain on the staff.

"I remember working ten hours a day and six days a week for a pittance," says Jean-Charles. But their endeavours were working. Titles such as *The One*, *Erebus*, *Magic*, *Balthazar* and the dog life-management sim, *Maddog*, were developed by EH Services and published under the Titus banner. Titus would also raid the archives of companies – *Classique Vol 1* carried clones of *Space Invaders*, *Pac Man* and *Breakout*.

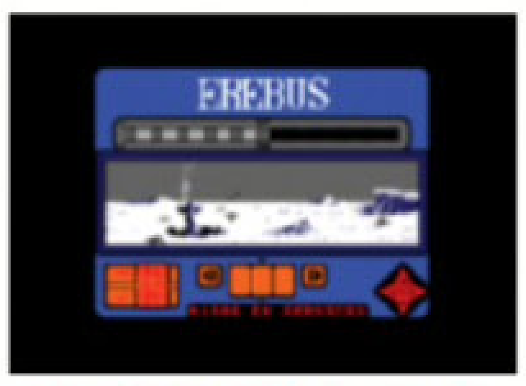
Titus' early games were coded on the Amstrad CPC first and ported later. "It was the most powerful machine at the time, and Titus had good CPC programmers," says Jean-Charles. It made sense because it helped the company to gain a strong foothold in the French market where the CPC was king. By September 1986, Amstrad France had sold more than 200,000 CPC 6128s, making it the country's top-selling computer and Titus' coders understood it well. This led to some groundbreaking developments including the use of overscan screens within CPC games such as *Knight Force* that used every pixel of the monitor.

To aid development, the company also created a processing emulator – a CPC without its Z80 chip that had been opened up and linked to a Z80 emulator. Caen explained that this made it a more powerful and flexible machine and it also allowed the team to develop for any Z80-based computer whether it was made by Amstrad, Sinclair or Sega.

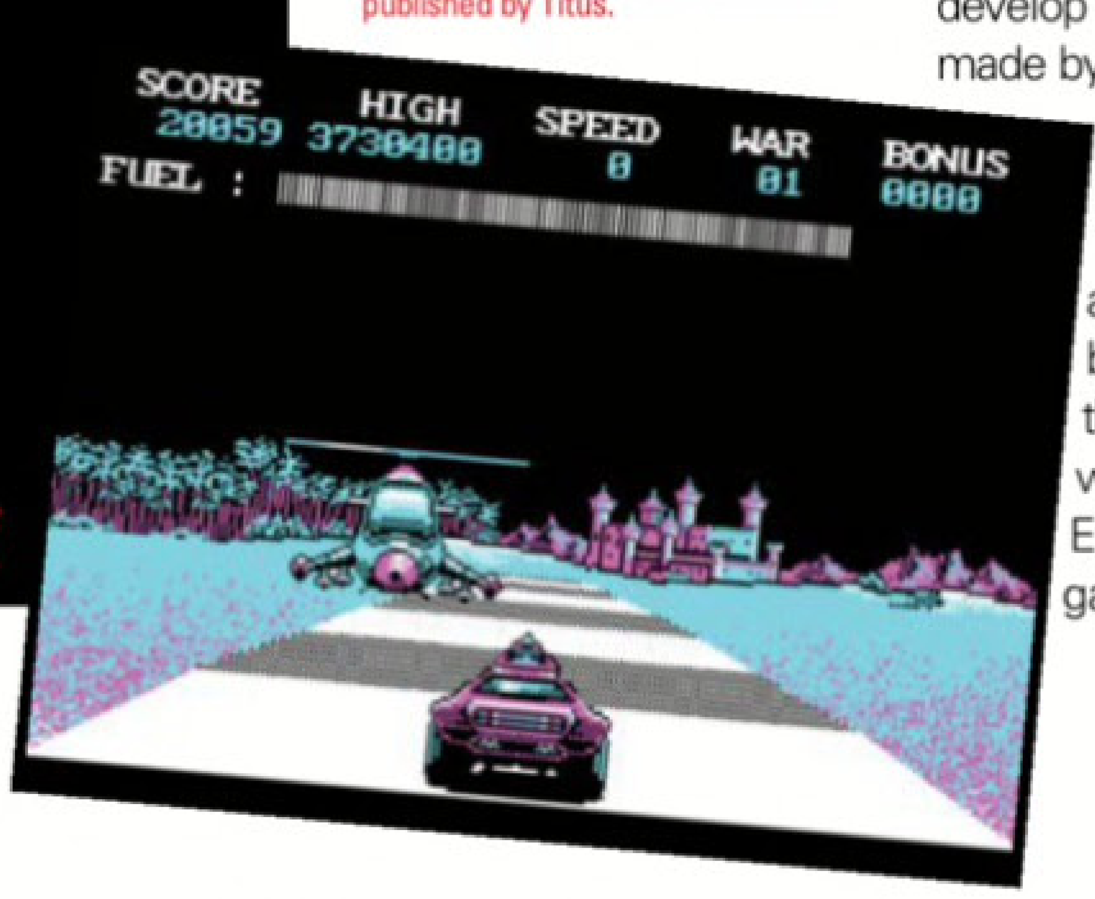
At the same time, the company was working with one eye on the foreign markets. "Since the beginning we wanted to be global and not French or European," says Eric. It began to look at ways to crack the US where the American manufacturer, Commodore, was performing exceptionally well. In 1987, Eric decided Titus' next title would be a driving game and he got down to work. "Titus had one



» [AMSTRAD CPC] *Dark Century* was an in-depth game which required a good read of the manual as you controlled tanks and tried to destroy the enemy.

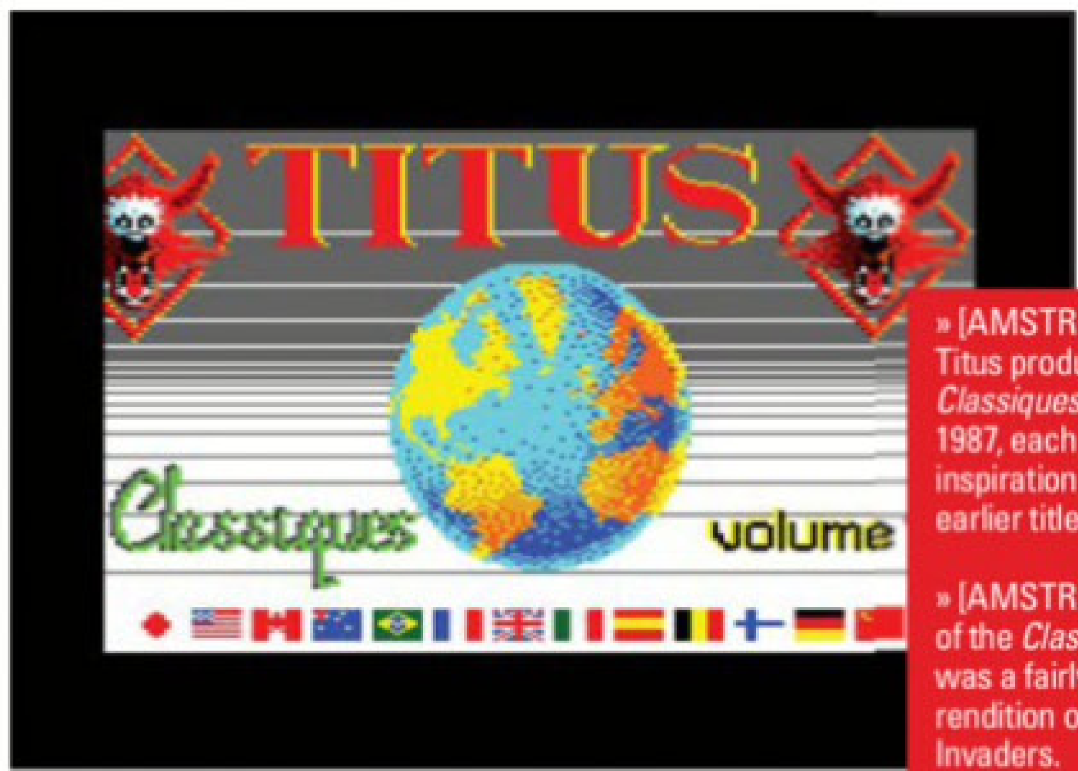


» [AMSTRAD CPC] *Erebus* was a French adventure which starts on an Antarctic volcano of the same name. It was created by EH Services and published by Titus.

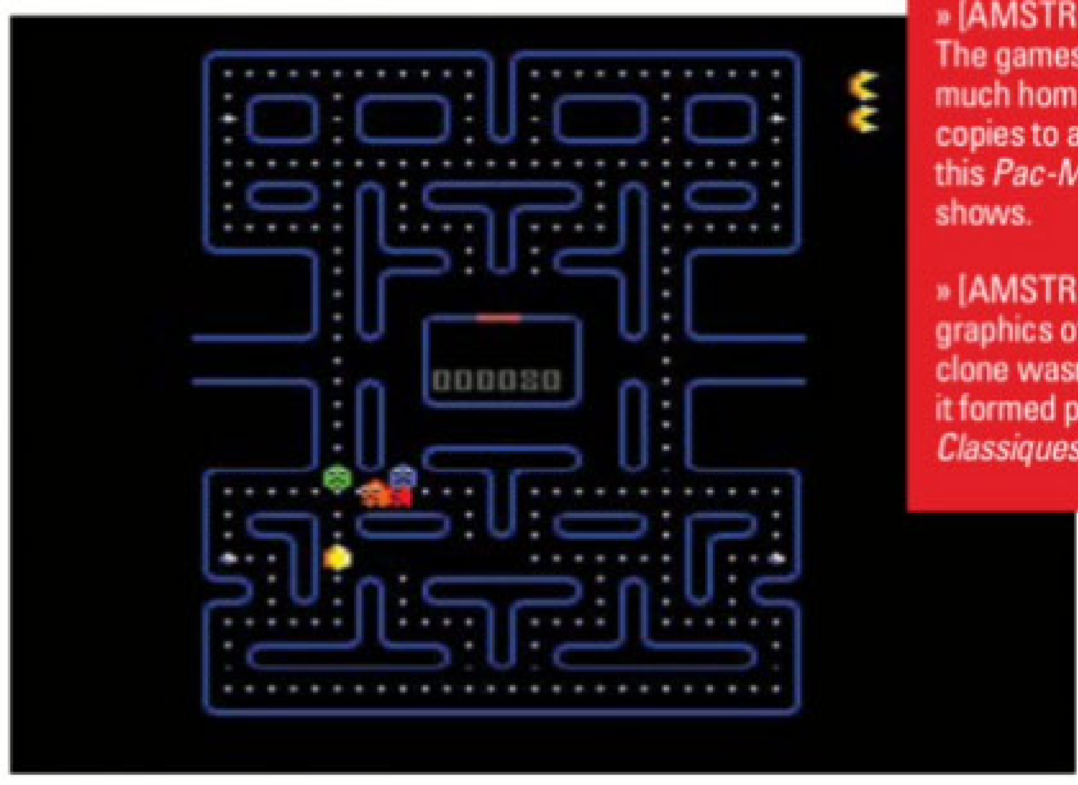


» [DOS] Titus' average racing game *Fire And Forget* involved lot of shooting but it was too fast.











» [AMSTRAD CPC] Titus produced three *Classiques* volumes in 1987, each of which drew inspiration from gaming's earlier titles.

» [AMSTRAD CPC] One of the *Classique* games was a fairly decent rendition of Space Invaders.

» [AMSTRAD CPC] The games were not so much homages as direct copies to a degree – as this *Pac-Man* clone shows.

» [AMSTRAD CPC] The graphics of this *Breakout* clone wasn't too hot but it formed part of the first *Classiques* volume.

of the first Amigas in France," says Jean-Charles. "So *Crazy Cars* was originally written on the Amiga."

With Hervé as producer and Olivier Corviole working on the graphics, Eric took a huge dollop of inspiration from Sega's *Out Run*. He produced a fast-paced game that was reasonably well-received by Amiga reviewers,"it is one of the first game of its kind on the Amiga," wrote Vipul Kapadia in *Commodore User*, "it will somehow keep you playing for hours" – and it also sold incredibly well. "*Crazy Cars* on the Amiga was our first hit," says Eric. "It sold 250,000 units and it was ported to every other machine."

Yet the rush to release the subsequent conversions to those machines backfired. *Amstrad Action* criticised the game for its poor sound and it pointed out that corners would "materialise out of nowhere", "as a budget game, this would be worthwhile," the reviewer concluded, "But at full price I'm not so sure." The Commodore 64 fared little better. "I remember finishing *Crazy Cars* on the Commodore 64 in about a month," said Jean-Charles.

The issue, he adds, is that Titus was concerned only with ensuring the game was released in the United States. "We shot a video to show the game and I wrote the code for the demo but the deceleration was greater than the acceleration. Just as the car got to the finish line, it was hit by another and the speed went to zero. It meant the car found itself blocked in just before the finish line." And yet he claims the company, showed a lack of concern about this. "That was the mentality at Titus – games had to come out in any state."

"Since the beginning we wanted to be global and not French or European,"

ERIC CAEN WANTED TITUS TO TAKE ON THE WORLD

Still, *Crazy Cars* was a turning point for Titus. The revenue it generated allowed the company to move into larger premises, and it began to hire more people including Jean-Michel Masson, Philippe Pamart, Eric Zmiro, Vincent Berthelot and Alain's brother, David Fernandez. At the same time, it set up Titus (UK) with assistance from the British company, Entertainment International. It subsequently released seven ZX Spectrum games.

Following the success of *Crazy Cars*, the 16-bits had become the development machines of choice. Alain coded the auto shoot-'em-up *Fire And Forget* on the Amiga and Atari ST in 1988 and, as with *Crazy Cars*, the 8-bits ports followed a few months later.

And yet the 8-bits remained important. *Titan* in 1989 was a solid achievement on the 8-bits and *Crazy Cars II* – complete with an overscan intro screen – sold 42,000 units on the Amstrad CPC. Titus claimed that it was the biggest seller of all time for the format.

What's more, Titus' experience with 8-bit machines helped it to enter the console market. *The Blues Brothers* was released for the NES in 1992, following debuts on the main home computers a year earlier. It wasn't an easy transition – "the main difficulty we had was moving from computers to consoles – the QA process of Nintendo was a lot more severe than our own QA", says Eric – but it was necessary. "*The Blues Brothers* licence on the NES was a key event for us, followed by *Prehistorik Man* on the SNES." Titus was growing and growing.

Yet Titus' sudden reliance on licences was surprising. Hervé had gone on record to say that licences were good for profits. "Even without a disk in the box it will sell," he said. But he also indicated that it was "harder to do a program that comes from nowhere and harder to do the creative work," adding "but we prefer it that way." And yet rather than

IN THE KNOW

- Eric Caen loved classic arcade games and it inspired him to learn 6502 Assembler.
- He co-founded EH Services with brother Hervé and made games for Loriciel, Infogrames and others.
- Titus was Eric's childhood nickname
- *Crazy Cars'* success allowed Titus to develop and publish all of its own games.
- Eric went on to become involved with more than 120 games at Titus.
- Titus distributed games made by British companies including Empire and Anco.
- The company was loyal to the Amstrad CPC which enjoyed the largest install base in France.
- It created cartridge games for the GX4000 console including *Dick Tracy*, *Wild Streets* and *Fire & Forget II*.
- Its final release for the CPC was *Prehistorik II* in 1993 – at a time when most other publishers had given up on the format.
- Titus would develop for any console or computer going – from the Fujitsu FM Towns to the Philips CDi.
- It developed an Atari 2600 version of *Crazy Cars* in 1990, but it wasn't released.
- It expanded rapidly in the late Nineties, acquiring many developers including BlueSky Software.



» [DOS] A beautiful platformer by Elmar Krieger, *Prehistoik 2* was released on the Amstrad CPC and DOS.



▶ concentrate purely on original games, *The Blues Brothers* was just one of many licenses bought by Titus as it sought to keep up with rivals such as Electronic Arts and Ocean Software. "We did a lot of licences," says Eric, before listing "*Xena*, *Hercules*, *Robocop*, *Superman*, *Kasparov*, *Quest For Camelot* and *Lotus*."

Unfortunately, too many of the licences bought by Titus had proven to be rather poor in execution. Critics were also finding the company to be slapdash and cynical since it would, at times, re-release games that were hated the first time around. One of the worst examples was in 1990 when it took the atrocity that was *DickTracy*, and, without taking advantage of the greater power and improved graphics capability of Amstrad's ill-fated GX4000, merely stuck it on cartridge and sold it as-was. In the face of that, *The Blues Brothers* was a ray of sunshine for Titus so bright that the sunglasses worn by the game's protagonists were entirely appropriate.

Indeed, *The Blues Brothers* helped to rehabilitate the company to a small degree. An explorative platformer in which players controlled either Jake or Elwood (the eponymous Blues brothers), the game was very well received, with great visuals and a pounding soundtrack. It helped to wash away the memories of the poor ports and stinkers that Titus had been dishing out to people. The likes of *Knight Force* and *Wild Streets* had become bywords for poor quality.

» [GX4000] Titus made games for the GX4000 console – a pity it just directly-ported standard CPC games to it.



Indeed, in its review of *The Blues Brothers*, Amiga Power included a line that was more damning than praiseful: "Don't let the Titus name put you off," it said. "They've finally come good." Ironic, then, in the wake of *The Blues Brothers*, it was the unique games which subsequently stood out. And it is fair to say, in the early Nineties, Titus hit something of a stride.

The company worked with external teams such as Cybele which produced Prehistorik for the Atari ST, taking the game and converting it for other platforms. It also spent money on a superb sequel, *Prehistorik II*, for the Amstrad CPC and DOS in 1993, a game that was ported to the Game Boy and SNES as *Prehistorik Man*. Titus was employing some of Europe's best talent, among them Charles Goodwin, the 36-year-old programmer behind both Prehistorik and Titus The Fox, games that had outstanding graphics and played very well. "*Titus The Fox* was a great game," says Eric.

By the mid-Nineties, it was building on previous franchises. It released *Lamborghini American Challenge* – or *Crazy Cars III* as it was originally intended, it published the platformer, *Quik The Thunder Rabbit*, which had been developed by Stywox. It also began to deliver a range of chess titles.



» [AMSTRAD CPC] *Arachnophobia* was developed by BlueSky Software and published by Titus which later went on to own the studio.

TIMELINE

- **1985** DEVELOPER EH SERVICES IS FORMED BY BROTHERS ERIC AND HERVÉ CAEN.
- **1985** TITUS INTERACTIVE IS CREATED AS A PUBLISHER BY THE CAENS.
- **1985** *THE ONE* BECOMES THE FIRST GAME TO BE RELEASED UNDER THE TITUS LABEL.
- **1987** *CRAZY CARS* IS RELEASED ON THE AMIGA.
- **1988** TITUS SOFTWARE CORPORATION IS CREATED IN CALIFORNIA.
- **1988** *FIRE AND FORGET* AND *TITAN* ARE RELEASED.
- **1990** AN ERA OF EXCELLENCE IS USHERED IN WITH THE LAUNCH OF *THE BLUES BROTHERS*.
- **1990** A DEAL IS STRUCK WITH AMSTRAD TO PROVIDE CARTRIDGE GAMES FOR THE GX4000 CONSOLE.
- **1991** CYBELE PRODUCES *PREHISTORIK* AND TITUS PUBLISHES IT.
- **1992** *TITUS THE FOX* IS RELEASED, USING THE COMPANY'S MASCOT IN A GAME FOR THE FIRST – AND ONLY – TIME.
- **1993** *PREHISTORIK 2* AND SUPER CAULDRON ARE CRITICALLY ACCLAIMED RELEASES.
- **1996** TITUS FLOATS ON THE FRENCH STOCK MARKET.
- **1997** *AUTOMOBILI LAMBORGHINI* IS RELEASED ON THE NINTENDO 64.
- **1998** TITUS BUYS DIGITAL INTEGRATION AND BLUESKY SOFTWARE.
- **1999** IT BECOMES A MAJORITY SHAREHOLDER VIRGIN INTERACTIVE.
- **1999** *SUPERMAN* IS NAMED THE WORST GAME OF ALL TIME.
- **2001** TITUS BECOMES A MAJORITY SHAREHOLDER IN INTERPLAY ENTERTAINMENT.
- **2003** *ROBOCOP* ATTEMPTS TO STEAL SUPERMAN'S "TERRIBLE GAME" TITLE.
- **2005** TITUS FILES FOR BANKRUPTCY.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



Eric Caen

Following the collapse of Titus in 2005, Eric Caen went on to become the president of Interplay, the California-based company Titus had taken overall control of four years earlier. The company has dusted off some old Titus franchises since then, among them *Prehistorik* for iOS and Crazy Cars: Hit The Road for Windows, Android and iOS. Eric is also the senior director of digital execution and market engagement for McDonald's.

Charles Goodwin

The man behind *Prehistorik* and *Titus The Fox* worked on *Fish Fillets* for ALTAR Interactive in 2004. It is the last game listed for this programmer who, presumably, left the industry.

Hervé Caen

Before seizing a majority, Titus had taken a large stake in Interplay in 1999. Hervé had become Interplay's president and director, assuming the position of CEO and interim chief financial officer in 2002.



Jean-Charles Meyrignac

Having left Titus in 1989 after two years and eight months, Jean-Charles worked for Ocean Software France for a year before taking on a roles at companies such as Cryo Interactive, Quantic Dream and Infogrames. He is now a development engineer for a French company which provides software to marketing and communication professionals.



Alain Fernandes

Alain continues to work in the games industry and he has enjoyed a 35-year career, working for Ubisoft, Loriciel, Renders, Ocean, Mindscape and Otaboo. In 2014, he worked on converting *Titan* for the Sony PS Vita, browsers, PCs and Mac.

Olivier Corviole

Although Olivier only briefly worked for Titus, his impact was keenly felt. He became an artistic director for a number of companies in France. He is now "professeur en licence communication" at the University of Paris VIII's technology institute, the IUT de Montreuil.

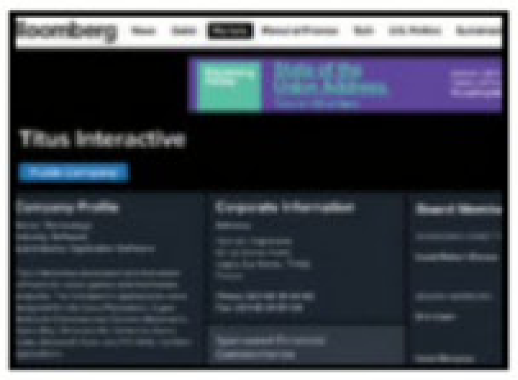


And as the years rolled by, Titus expanded faster than it had ever done before. It already had a US-arm called Titus Software Corporation in California but the industry was changing and Titus had to continuing adapting. "It was hard to move from 2D to 3D," Eric says. And so in 1996, in order to give itself a better chance of success and raise money for further growth, Titus floated on the French stock market as Titus Games plc, moving to Le Nouveau Marche stock exchange a year later. It then began to look for potential acquisitions. "It was hard to find talent," Eric concedes. "It was faster to buy companies."

By 1997 it had sales of more than £14.5 million but its gaming output was mixed. While *Automobili Lamborghini* was a fine racing game for the Nintendo 64 (and sold in an improved form in Japan as Super *Speed Race 64*), *Incantation* had been a poorly received late-SNES platform game, and *Quest For Camelot* bombed on the Game Boy Color. The N64 version was scrapped.

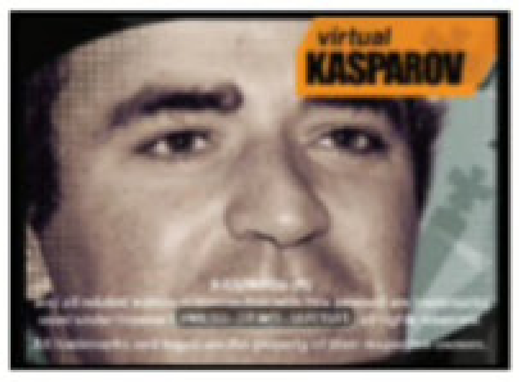
But in 1998, Titus snapped up Digital Integration, a London-based studio which made flight sims for the PC and this allowed Titus Games to grow strong in the PC marketplace. It also bought BlueSky Software which gave Titus a firmer foothold in the attractive PlayStation market. "After our IPO in 1996, we raised money and with that cash we bought many competitors. That was almost the only way for us to grow rapidly," says Eric.

THE DNA OF TITUS SOFTWARE



Gallic flair?

Titus entered the market later than firms in America and Britain (most of France's industry started between 1985 and 1987) so it could see gaming's potential. Creativeness arguably took more of a backseat as a result.



Diverse development

Titus seemed to excel when it developed platform games but it is impossible to pin the company down to a genre or two. It produced puzzle games, driving games, FPSes and chess games. If it could potentially sell, it made it.



Recognisable logo

The name Titus does not immediately conjure up a vision of a fox but these animals are certainly a cuter option for a logo than a Roman Emperor. The fox logo was used very early on, appearing on Titus games around 1987.



Arrogance?

A sheer number of games combined with the attraction of licenses, ensured Titus grew very rich. In 2000 when it was riding high, it was expecting 500% growth. It allowed it to swallow up other companies but did it become too arrogant?



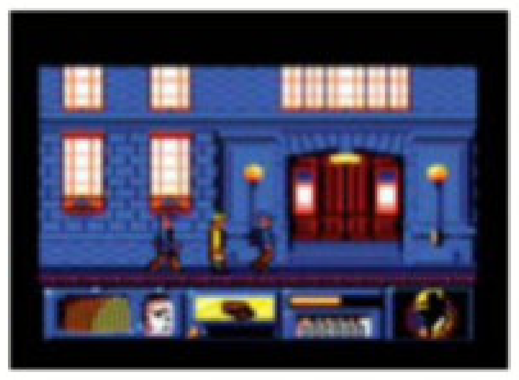
Global outlook

Today, France is the second largest producer of videogames in the world after the United States and 80 per cent of its games are exported. Titus was an early pioneer. It had offices in Paris, Los Angeles, San Diego, London, Leamington Spa and Toyko.



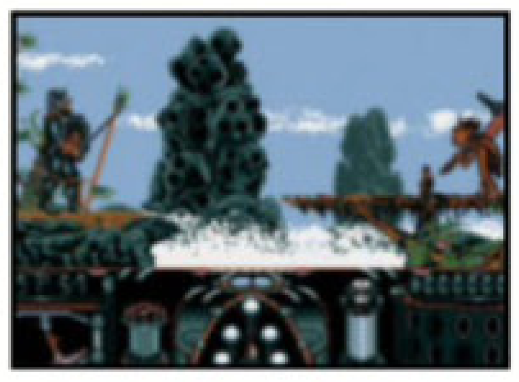
Familiar games

If a game was proving popular, Titus wanted in on the action. *Crazy Cars* was inspired by Out Run; Incantation on the SNES was like *Mega Man*; *Off Shore Warriors* was *Crazy Cars* on water. Eric Caen said the company became influenced by *Mario* and *Zelda*.



Licenses galore

Titus bought lots of licences (even going as far as signing Gary Kasparov for its chess game) and, as with all publishers which did this, saw it as a way to guarantee a hit. *The Blues Brothers* worked well; *Superman*, *Dick Tracy* and *Robocop* less so.



Terrible titles

Titus' reputation – except for a good spell in the early Nineties – typically took a battering. The company would rush some games and the results were awful. *Knightforce* on the Amiga was unplayable. *Tiny Skweeks* on the SNES was just frustrating...

> **"That was the mentality at Titus – games had to come out in any state"**
> JEAN-CHARLES MEYRIGNAC ON THE POOR STATE OF SOME GAMES

The expansion should have meant Titus was stronger. Digital Integration's *Top Gun: Combat Zones* in 2001 was one of Eric's favourites, and Titus was offering a mix of licenses and unique games during the frantic late-Nineties, from Virtual Chess on the Nintendo 64 in 1997 to *Superman* on the Game Boy. Titus snapped up Smart Dog and Virgin Interactive too, renaming the latter Avalon Interactive in 2003.

But the quality was dipping as Titus headed back to its early reputation-denting days. This was never more starkly seen than with *Superman* on the N64. Based on *Superman: The Animated Series* it was released in an astonishingly bad state. *Superman N64* is known to be not as great it could have been," says Eric, with stark understatement. "You can never be satisfied with every game when you are developing so fast." Titus was having a torrid time: *Blues Brothers 2000* attempted to roll back to the good days but it achieved a Metacritic rating of 32 out of 100.

Then, in 2001, Titus bought a majority stake in Interplay which had been struggling since 1998. "Our group became the 12th largest in the world," says Eric proudly. Hervé became Interplay's CEO and the firm started to make some major decisions. Interplay's Shiny Entertainment was sold and BlueSky Software was eventually axed.

As more and more of Titus' attention was paid to shore up Interplay in the hope of bolstering both firms, a humongous collapse ensued. Lawyers swooped and Titus was forced to go into liquidation. It filed for bankruptcy on 9 January 2005 with around £25 million of debt. Interplay continued with Hervé at the helm. "Multiple factors were to blame [for the collapse]," says Eric. "But mainly the cash crunch on the financial market prevented us to roll the debt raised in 2000 to buy Interplay."

In the end, "we were young and inexperienced", concludes Eric. "but after all it was an amazing ride, don't you think?"Looking at their story, it is difficult to disagree. *



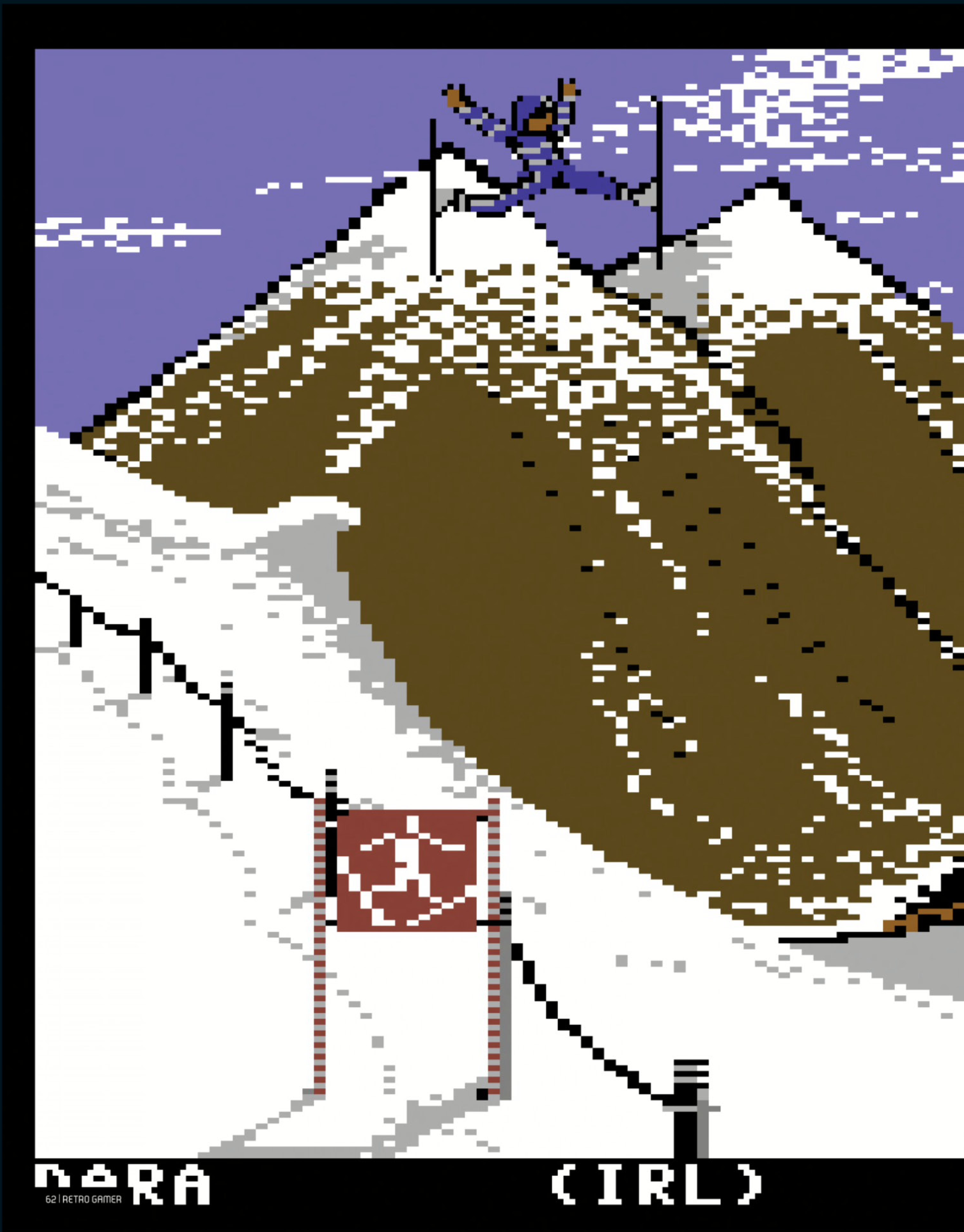
» [DOS] The 3D game, *Metal Rage: Defender Of The Earth*, was a poor shooter involving tanks.

» [SNES] *Lamborghini American Challenge* on the SNES supported the Super Scope Light Gun.





» [AMIGA] Trying to capture criminals in *Highway Patrol II* did not provide much in the way of seat-of-your-pants action.


(IRL)



Winter Games

HOT DIGGITY DOG!

RETROREVIVAL

» COMMODORE 64
» EPYX
» 1985

I'm not sure that it's entirely natural for me to have developed a fondness for winter sports – I come from a town where the dry ski slope was demolished, and haven't actually seen any snow years. The closest I have ever come to actually ski jumping was falling over on a patch of ice while mildly inebriated. But I do love snowboarding from a spectator's perspective, and quite a few of my favourite games are winter sports games like *SSX Tricky*, *Winter Heat* and Epyx's excellent *Winter Games*.

What hooked me on *Winter Games* as a kid was the variety of the game. Each of the events feels distinct and Epyx clearly didn't skimp on any of them – they all look very nice and have well-developed play mechanics. Over the long term, my favourite event has become the biathlon, as it conveys the length of the real event and really rewards you for building up a good rhythm over the course of your run. Managing your heart rate for steady shots is a rather cool mechanic too, and predates the diazepam-aided sniping of *Metal Gear Solid*.

But my favourite when I was younger was always the Hot Dog, and it's still the event that brings the biggest nostalgia rush. Besides the ridiculous name, you get to do backflips and the crash animations are amusing. In fact, I'll occasionally land my jumper on his head deliberately, purely to please the childish part of me that still gets a kick out of them… *

8.8



Traveller's Tales, Sega Of Europe and Sonic Team co-developed Sonic's 3D debut following the shelving of the long-awaited Sonic X-Treme. Rory Milne finds out how coder Jon Burton and producer Kats Sato co-created Sonic R



» Kats Sato has worked on a number of games at Sega, including being director of product development on *Headhunter* and *Shinobi*.



» Jon Burton, the co-founder of Traveller's Tales has received three Baftas and still makes games there.

Early 1997 saw a contrast between Sega Of America and Sega Of Europe's contributions to the *Sonic The Hedgehog* franchise. *Sonic X-Treme* – a long-running and troubled project of Sega's US division – had collapsed leaving the Saturn without a polygon-powered *Sonic* title. By comparison, Sega Of Europe had recently helped deliver the platformer, *Sonic 3D,* for the Mega Drive and Saturn in partnership with UK developer, Traveller's Tales, and Sega of Japan's Sonic Team.

Soon after *Sonic X-Treme*'s cancellation, *Sonic 3D*'s success ensured a second collaboration, as former SOE Senior Producer Kats Sato recalls,"Sega Of America planned to internally develop *Sonic X-Treme* on Genesis [but] the target platform was soon changed, and finally this project failed. After the success of *Sonic 3D,* it was very natural that Sega Of Europe continued working with Traveller's Tales on another *Sonic* project."

Traveller's Tales founder, Jon Burton, cites serendipity and familiarity with tight deadlines as reasons for Kats inviting him to work on Sonic's first polygonal title but doesn't remember the responsibility causing concern. "I think it was a matter of timing. The *Sonic X-Treme* team had obviously run into trouble, and Sega were looking for an alternative they could quickly bring to market. We'd completed a successful *Sonic* game on time and on budget for them, so I guess they were reasonably happy working with us again. We had always been able to develop games in timescales that would normally send other developers running, so for us the timelines involved weren't impossible. I'm not sure we felt extra pressure as such. I just thought it would be cool to make the first 3D *Sonic* game."

As Kats explains, the initial ideas for this new project would come out of discussions between Jon and himself, with Sonic Team's involvement coming at a later stage. "Jon Burton and I had a unique race game idea using *Sonic* characters. This was the start of the project, and I am not conscious of working with Sonic Team at that time. Jon and I were calling the game '*Sonic TT*' at the beginning. I was meaning *Tourist Trophy,* but Jon was thinking it fitted his company name. I don't remember why we started to call it *R,* but I think it was a decision made by Sega Of Europe marketing."

The uniqueness of the pair's racer was laid down in these early discussions and hinged on their decision to include explorable off-course areas. "The *Sonic* games are known for having many different routes through a level," Jon points out, "so it was natural that our game should provide the same. This would also help the title stand out as not just being a standard racing game; it would have the *Sonic* distinctiveness."

On Sonic Team's induction into the *Sonic R* project, Kats details the complicated division of duties that ▶



IN THE KNOW

- **» PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **» DEVELOPER:** TRAVELLER'S TALES / SEGA OF EUROPE / SONIC TEAM
- **» RELEASED:** 1997
- **» PLATFORM:** SATURN, PC
- **» GENRE:** RACER



"SONIC R 101"

■ Initially, *Sonic R* lets you race as one of four *Sonic* characters over four courses and in its simplest form is played as a straight racer against CPU-controlled opponents or a second player. Long-term value is provided by unlocking an extra course and racers with hidden off-track coins and emeralds.



was arranged. "After getting the project green-lit, my main counterpart [at Sonic Team] was Takashi Iizuka, and he provided me [with] design documents, which included maps of circuits with hidden areas. Hirokazu Yasuhara designed some of the maps, but not all of them. The project was managed by me in England, but [the] official producer was Mr. Yuji Naka [who] was overseeing the project and gave some opinions to us from Japan."

In order to get a running start on *Sonic R*, Jon remembers reworking the beginnings of an F1 Saturn game. "We'd got basic AI working and had the basics of a render engine that could draw the track and cars, but we hadn't built many assets beyond a McLaren and a test track. The factors that led to repurposing the title were the timelines. Sega felt the best chance of getting a Sonic game to market quickly was for us to re-task our F1 project."

While the results of Jon's coding and Sonic Team's beautiful hand-drawn course designs spoke for themselves, *Sonic R*'s evolving gameplay required the skills of the project's only Japanese and English speaking member. "Kats was the conduit for most of the communication as he was around in person most of the time," Jon notes, "He'd then communicate with Japan separately." Kats expands on this aspect of the game's development, "Takashi Iizuka sent very detailed course layouts, but the game design and flow documents were not so detailed, [instead] we always discussed the game design by chatting with Japan. None of the staff at Sonic Team could speak English fluently at that time [so they couldn't] provide detailed game design to Jon."

When asked about the aesthetics of *Sonic R*'s courses, Jon highlights references to *Sonic 3D* as well as earlier *Sonic* games. "Certainly the look and feel of the circuits were inspired by other *Sonic* titles. Probably most strongly from *Sonic 3D* – but most of [its] zones were based on the original *Sonic* games. I know we had buildings on the first track that would have come from *Sonic 3D*."

Clever reward mechanics soon emerged from the ongoing gameplay discussions where unlockable content was tied to winning races and collecting coins and Chaos Emeralds, which Kats reasons broadened *Sonic R* without overtaxing the Saturn. "Sonic Team – Iizuka mainly – asked for additional features all the time. Jon and I examined those opinions together with our ideas. Honestly speaking, we were always facing technical problems. The Saturn wasn't so powerful a console, so we tried to make the gameplay fun within its limitations."

Other aspects of *Sonic R* were also taking shape, such as the character models for the game's colourful line-up of racers. "All the 3D models were created by Traveller's Tales based on [Sonic Team's] 2D sketches of the characters," Kats reveals, "Iizuka gave comments on not only the 3D models, but also the characters' animation. I think we did not change the character line-up, but we probably added the hidden characters like Metal Knuckles and Tales Doll later on." Jon's memories of *Sonic R*'s characters are of coding tools that dovetailed with modelling software. "We developed all our tools to work directly with Softimage. We did all our modelling and animation – as well as our ring placement and power-up placement – with Softimage and then converted that data to the Saturn."

Additional coding considerations included accommodating *Sonic R*'s off-course areas within Jon's repurposed *F1 3D* engine and perfecting the game's 3D camera, the latter of which Jon acknowledges took some work. "We have always created our



» [Saturn] Up-arrows framing Radical City's fruit machine signpost the vertical boost given by its chequered base.



» [Saturn] The ancient artefacts of the Regal Ruins course nicely set the tone for the stage.



» [Saturn] Robotnik's hovercraft turns on a dime, but this hard right requires serious drift from Sonic.

SUPER SATURN RACING More must-play Saturn racing games



SEGA RALLY 1995

■ While retaining conventions from various racers that came before it, *Sega Rally* somehow also manages to feel completely different from any of its predecessors. This instant classic delivers rally car racing with convincing road handling over distinct road surfaces against the clock where the slightest mistake costs you vital seconds.



DAYTONA USA: CIRCUIT EDITION 1997

■ *Circuit Edition* addresses the respective failings of each previous *Daytona* port – it has a high frame-rate, drift settings for non-analogue controls and both original and remixed soundtracks. The title demands relentless momentum and twitch reactions in order to weave your way into first position.



SHUTOKOU BATTLE '97 1997

■ Essentially an enhanced version of the PlayStation title *Tokyo Highway Battle*, *Shutokou Battle '97* runs slightly faster, which helps provide a greater sensation of speed. The unrealistic aspects of your race with a rival along the dual carriageways of Tokyo – like buses driving at 90 – just add to the excitement.



TOUGE KING THE SPIRITS 2 1997

■ The 'Touge' in *Touge King* refers to steep Japanese mountain passes built with multiple 'S' bends for the ease of heavy vehicles. Graphically, Cave's sequel improves dramatically on earlier instalments while keeping the focus on high-speed touge racing where drifting around bends is critical to success – not to mention survival.



MANX TT SUPER BIKE 1997

■ Matching *Sega Rally*'s twisting courses and Daytona USA's pace, *Manx TT* a control method unique to motorcycling allowing you to manage how hard you lean into corners of varying severity while trying to maintain a perfect racing line. In terms of visual detail, *TT* betters the two aforementioned Saturn racers.



» [Saturn] An industrial walkway divides sea from sky as Sonic overtakes Tails in the Reactive Factory.

own 3D engines and have designed them to be flexible. [So we could] easily flip from racing to platforming. 3D cameras are very difficult to get right and it was a definite challenge so early in the lifecycle of 3D games."

Jon also pushed the Saturn in order to produce stunning visual effects, which is something he fondly remembers doing. "I loved programming the Saturn, I was pushing everyday to get the most out of the hardware. I just spent lots of time trying different things; really doing things the hardware wasn't designed for to see what effect it would create. I was really pleased when we got transparencies and fading working, and I loved the water effect, but it was the reflective surfaces that I was most pleased with. The Saturn wouldn't support reflective surfaces – full stop. So we wrote a reflective renderer in software and I ran it on the slave CPU."

Naturally, Sonic Team were keen to see Jon's progress as well as receiving reports from Kats who reflects on the difficulties of sharing game builds in the Nineties. "It was 1997 when the Internet [had] not spread, so we could not share the data easily. I think we sent CDs on each milestone stage."

Gauging *Sonic R*'s difficulty and implementing the game's two-player split-screen option also proved challenging. "It was difficult to make sure you couldn't cheat too easily and cut huge corners off of the course, making it too easy to win," Jon admits. "So each short cut needed a penalty if you got it wrong and required real skill to use. Getting split-screen to work took a lot of time. I needed to recode the effects that we had working."



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

MICKEY MANIA
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE, MEGA CD, SNES
YEAR: 1994

TOY STORY (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE, SNES, PC
YEAR: 1995

SONIC 3D
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE, SATURN, PC
YEAR: 1996

With *Sonic R*'s core gameplay in place, the task of fine-tuning the game's courses and other aspects of the title remained, which fell to Sega Of Europe and visiting Sonic Team member Hirokazu Yasuhara. "We did not have time to get opinions from Japan for the final tuning of the game," Kats concedes, "so we asked Hirokazu Yasuhara to come over to England. The days Yasuhara-san stayed were only a part of the whole development period of the project. Yasuhara-san fine-tuned the game, and we did respect his work, but he wasn't the only person to [do so]. We also allocated testers [from] the Sega Of Europe offices for checking the quality including the gameplay balance."

Sadly, despite Kats' vital roles of breaking down language barriers to allow *Sonic R* to be co-developed and managing the project from England, the producer's hard work would ultimately go uncredited. "I had to change some of the game design due to technical problems and schedule matters," explains Kats. "Iizuka, my main counterpart agreed [with] my opinions, but Mr. Yuji Naka didn't. I had a quarrel with Naka-san, and I decided to remove my name from the credits. But I had many conversations with Naka-san after I left Sega, and Naka-san, Iizuka, Yasuhara-san and even Oshima-san are still Facebook friends."

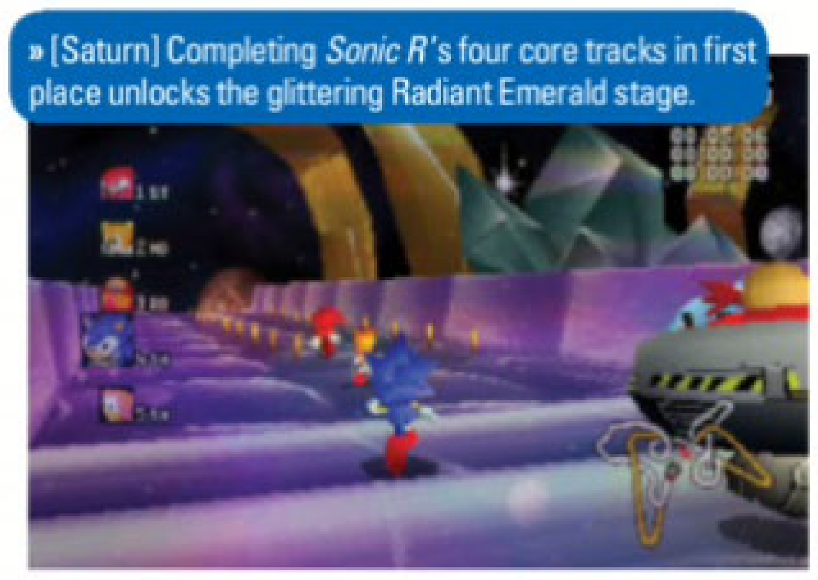
A late decision of Yuji Naka's was that the tunes on *Sonic R*'s soundtrack should all feature singing, which Jon appreciates now despite considering it mad at the time. "I didn't know it was [Yuji Naka's] decision actually, and I thought they were crazy when it was suggested, but Richard Jacques did a great job and I always play it with the singing on now."

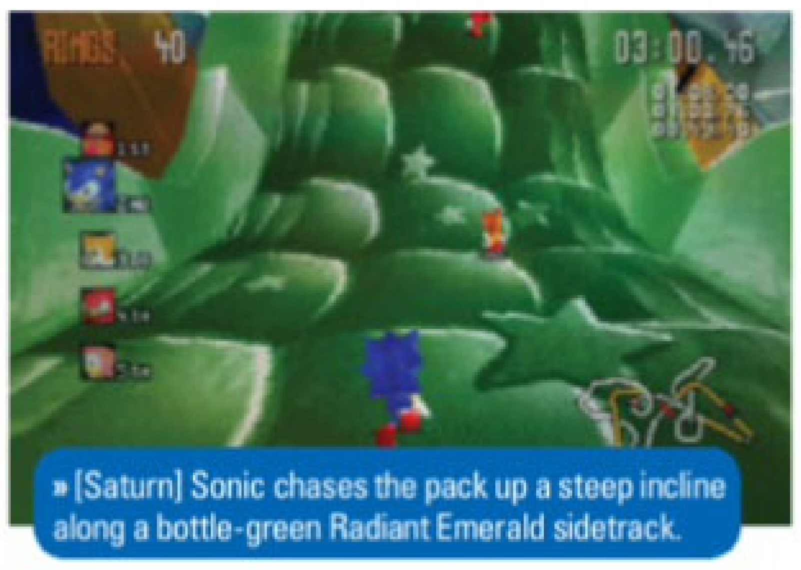
Although completed on deadline, *Sonic R* still had to be manufactured and delivered to shops in time for Christmas – and in the case of the US, in time for their slightly earlier holiday season. "For the final submissions, I delivered the build CD to America for manufacturing. We [paid] for an air-ticket [just to get] the [build] data there," Kats discloses. "I think we released the US version first, and it was a tight schedule for delivering the product to the warehouse for the holiday season. If my memory is right, we had different manufacturers for each territory. We sent the data by a normal courier service to Japan afterwards."

Jon's memories of *Sonic R* are of the pleasure he still gets from playing the Saturn racer he co-created. "Given the time we had, and considering we had to learn a completely new hardware system and push it to the maximum, I'm really pleased with the result, and yes, I still play it from time to time!" ✱

Thanks to Jon Burton and Kats Sato for their time and recollections.

» [Saturn] Completing *Sonic R*'s four core tracks in first place unlocks the glittering Radiant Emerald stage.





» [Saturn] Sonic chases the pack up a steep incline along a bottle-green Radiant Emerald sidetrack.

BRILLIANT BURTON

Choice picks from Jon Burton's back-catalogue

LEANDER
■ SYSTEM: Amiga, Mega Drive
■ YEAR: 1991



A Nineties Psygnosis release that looks the part – its visuals scream Roger Dean – but unlike *Shadow Of The Beast*, Jon's hack-and-slash platformer has as much substance as style. Influenced by titles of the day, *Leander* boasts refined gameplay and smooth animation.

PUGGSY
■ SYSTEM: Amiga, Mega Drive, Mega CD
■ YEAR: 1993



Another scrolling platformer published by Psygnosis, although *Puggsy* foregoes *Leander*'s slice-and-dice adventuring in favour of head-scratching puzzles and tests of dexterity. Jon's colourful platformer couldn't be more different thematically or visually.

MICKEY MANIA
■ SYSTEM: Mega Drive, Mega CD
■ YEAR: 1994



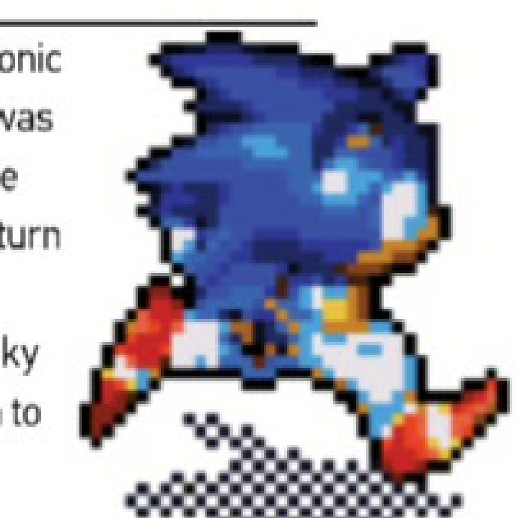
Developing the cute-but-tough *Puggsy* no doubt proved useful to Jon when it came to producing Traveller's Tales' first game for Disney. *Mickey Mania*'s whimsical playing environment revolves around a well thought out time-travel mechanic.

TOY STORY
■ SYSTEM: Mega Drive, SNES, PC
■ YEAR: 1995



This adaptation is best remembered for its impressive pre-rendered sprites, Jon's adaptation of the Pixar classic faithfully follows the film's plot via a series of mainly platformer-based minigames supplemented by others representing almost every popular Nineties arcade sub-genre.

SONIC 3D
■ SYSTEM: Mega Drive, Saturn, PC
■ YEAR: 1996



Conceived as a goodbye for Sonic on the Mega Drive, *Sonic 3D* was also co-opted as a last-minute substitute for the troubled Saturn title *Sonic X-Treme*. On both formats, Jon's take on the spiky blue mascot adds exploration to *Sonic*'s mad-dash formula.

RPG Heaven:

The Greatest SNES RPGS of all time



During the 16-bit console wars, both the Mega Drive and the Super Nintendo had their strengths that attracted gamers. Join Martin Hinson as he revisits the RPGs that made Mega Drive owners incredibly jealous



Terranigma

PUBLISHER: ENIX (JP) NINTENDO (PAL) **DEVELOPER:** QUINTET **YEAR** 1995

Terranigma is something of an oddity in the Super Nintendo RPG library. It was first released in 1995 in Japan under the title *Tenchi Sozo*, which translates as 'The Creation of Heaven and Earth'. A year later it was localised by Nintendo for the PAL markets but somehow never saw a release in America. This was extremely rare as most SNES RPGs made the trip to the US first and only a handful ever made it to PAL territories, a fact that explains why *Terranigma* now commands very high prices when bought online.

Terranigma is an action RPG that tells the story of Ark and his quest to resurrect life on Earth. It uses a top-down view and a fairly simple, but quite deep, real-time combat system. Ark has plenty of abilities such as dashing, jumping, sliding, guarding and an unusual magic system. For example, you must find Magirocks, which are taken to the magic shop to be turned into consumable spells. Once used, the spells turn back into Magirock and can be taken to the shop again. The game moves at quite a pace, even for an action-based RPG. Ark is instantly controllable and responds to commands on a whim, making him a joy to control.

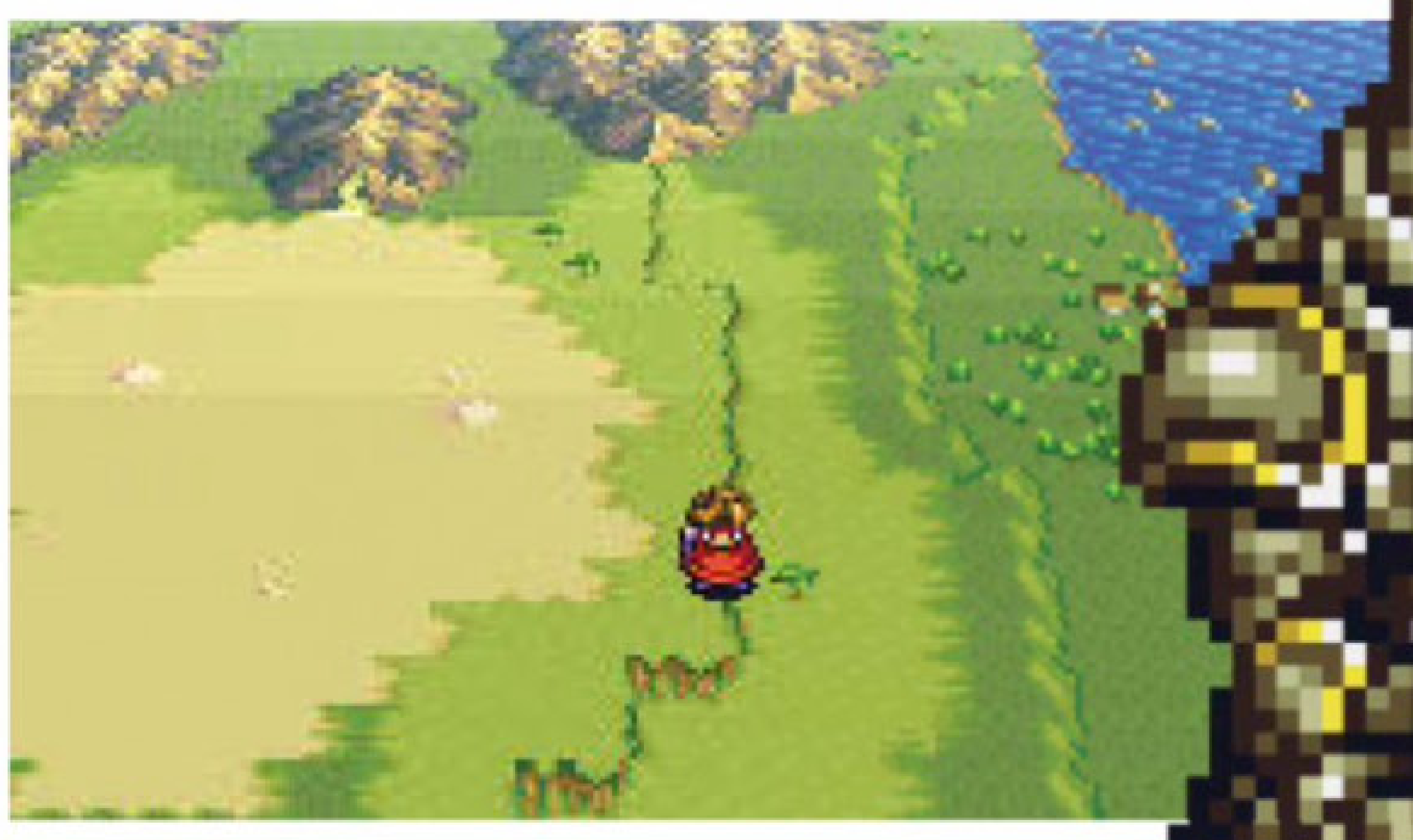
The meat of *Terranigma* involves the resurrection of Earth. Once you complete the first five towers at the start of the game, the continents of the world are restored and Ark travels to the mainland in order to kick-start life. Your first task is to revive the plant life to enable nature to begin its journey. Ark can converse with the plants and they will guide you to revive the animals and then eventually mankind. This is predominantly achieved by travelling to various parts of the world to complete dungeons, gain items and trigger the multitude of story events.

The reason *Terranigma* is so good, though, is down to expert execution of various elements by developers, Quintet. It manages to tell a wonderfully moving story and mix in plenty of original elements within the genre. For example, once you revive mankind, you are tasked with building the economies of the continents by helping residents make discoveries and then introducing them to different cultures.

The plot is quite unique because you play a large portion of the game with no real enemy. Normally in RPGs there is a defining evil from the very beginning of the game, but not so with *Terranigma*, which unravels with a level of skill not seen in many console games of the time. It's filled with deception, regret, love, religion and science and told with excellent pacing.

Terranigma also features superb graphics that vary from dank, desolate landscapes to vibrant jungles. The animation is excellent, character designs are attractive and the boss fights are impressive. The music is also superb, one of the best soundtracks of the generation for sure.

We're praying the game gets a Virtual Console release so it can be enjoyed by those who missed it the first time around. This is probably the most anticipated game on the service now *Earthbound* has been released. *Terranigma* is an all-time classic that despite commanding high prices is worth a place in any SNES owner's collection.







Soul Blazer

PUBLISHER: ENIX **DEVELOPER:** QUINTET **YEAR:** 1992

Seen as the first part of an unofficial trilogy that features both *Illusion of Time* and *Terranigma*, *Soul Blazer* is an action RPG based around the theme of resurrection. Essentially a dungeon-crawler, the player is tasked with freeing the souls of lost humans which, once released, rebuild the towns around them on your way to defeating the evil Deathtoll. The game tells a simple but poignant story that certainly has the power to draw the player in. Combat is also rather simple but somehow it all works like a dream because it's fast-paced, with plenty of enemies and some excellent boss battles. A forgotten gem you need to experience.

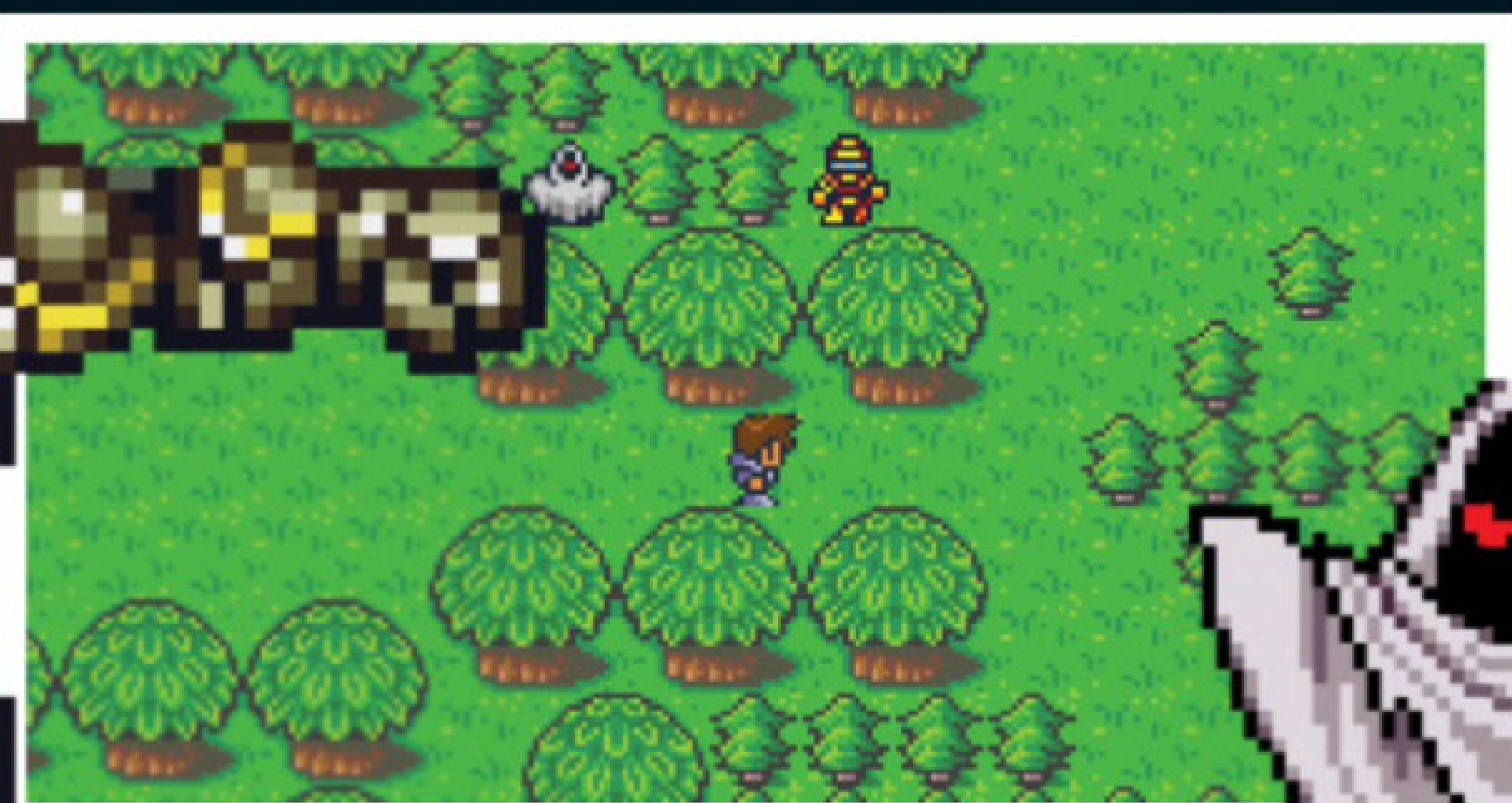




Mystic Quest Legend

PUBLISHER: SQUARE (US/JP) NINTENDO (PAL) **DEVELOPER:** SQUARE **YEAR:** 1992

Developed by Square and aimed as an entry-level RPG, *Mystic Quest Legend* was notable for being the first *Final Fantasy*-themed game released in the PAL regions, although it was a spin-off rather than actual canon. Despite being dramatically cut down in the overall gameplay department, *Mystic Quest Legend* is absorbing and enjoyable mainly thanks to its fun battle system and some fantastic music. There are no random battles here, as enemies are onscreen and a battle starts when you touch them. The game is also littered with optional battle arenas for levelling. With plenty of items, weapons and enemies, it's a simple but enjoyable experience.

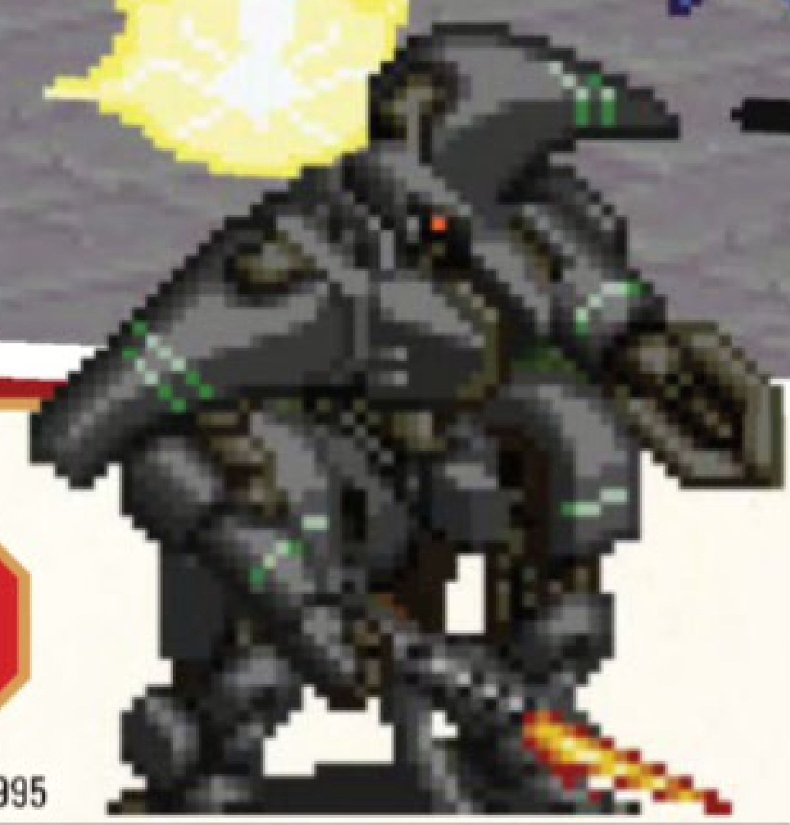






Breath of Fire II





PUBLISHER: CAPCOM (NA/JP) LAGUNA (EU) **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE **YEAR:** 1994

Superior in almost every way to its predecessor, Capcom's *Breath of Fire II* is another high-quality RPG for the Super Nintendo. The majority of the game is viewed from a traditional top-down perspective, but battles are viewed from a visually superb isometric viewpoint that features fantastic sprites and glorious special effects. Combat is turn-based and does feature random battles, but the pace of battles remains fast enough to avoid frustration. Centring around now series-staple characters Ryu and Nina, Ryu has the ability to transform into a dragon, which is one of the most interesting parts of the game. The recurring characters, much like *The Legend of Zelda's*, are descendants of previous characters and not the same ones. Despite a sluggish start and occasionally iffy translation, *Breath of Fire II* picks up pace to evolve into a truly great RPG.



Front Mission

PUBLISHER: SQUARE **DEVELOPER:** G-CRAFT **YEAR:** 1995

Released only in Japan in 1995, *Front Mission* still managed to gain a cult following in the West and was finally released in an officially translated form in North America during 2007 on Nintendo's DS. The game is an RPG of a tactical nature with linear game progression and a deep, entertaining plot. Set in 2090 and revolving around the colonisation of a fictitious island in the Pacific Ocean, *Front Mission* tells a tale that's as intriguing as it is fresh. The battle system is mostly in the usual tactical mould, however when attacks are performed, the game cuts to a close-up of the target in question for some spectacular visual effects. Depth comes from the customisation on offer. The majority of units are Wanzers, giant walking tanks that have four unique health bars: one each for the legs, left arm, right arm and body. Each is upgradable as the game progresses. It's different, but highly recommended.

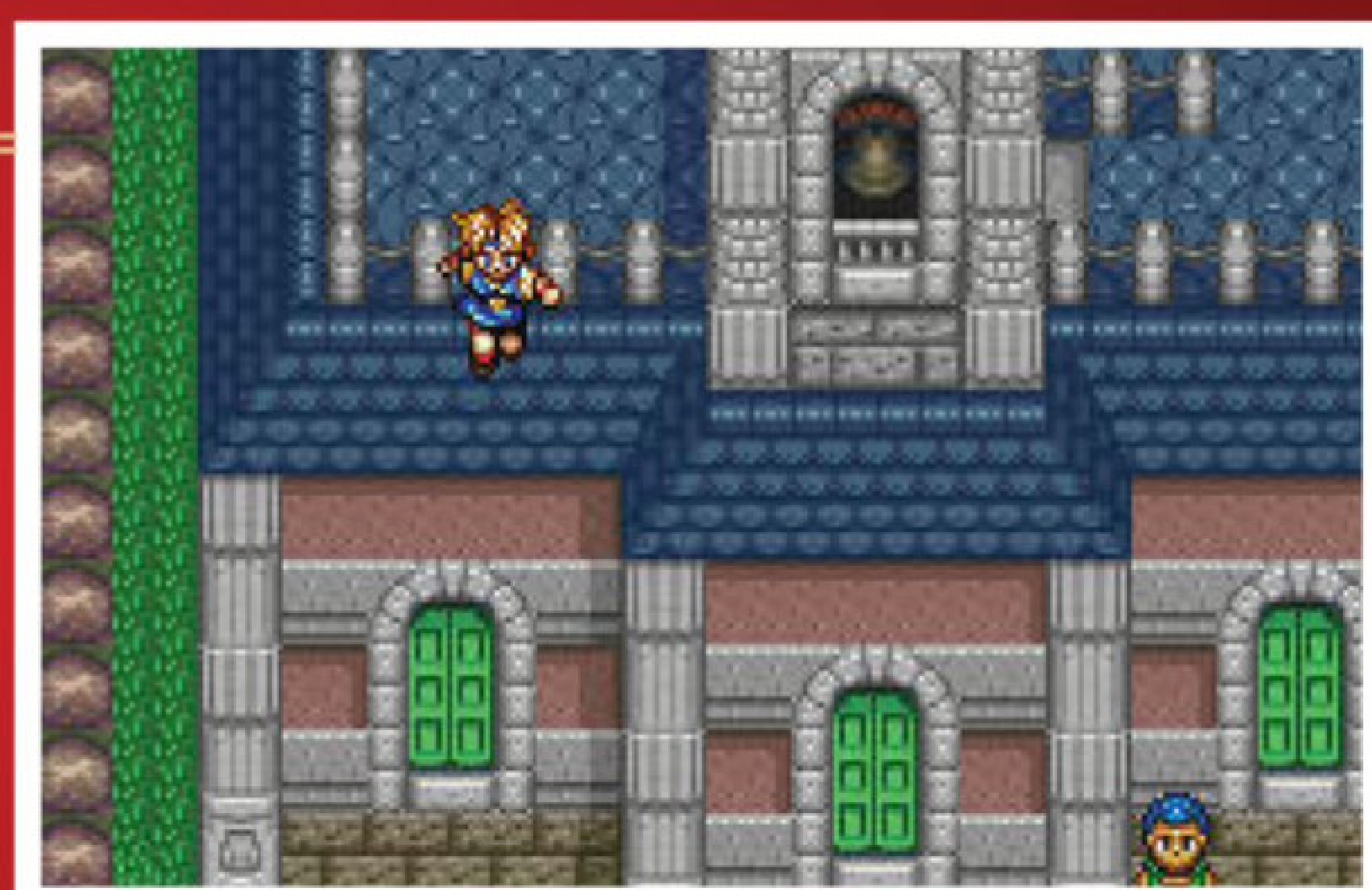


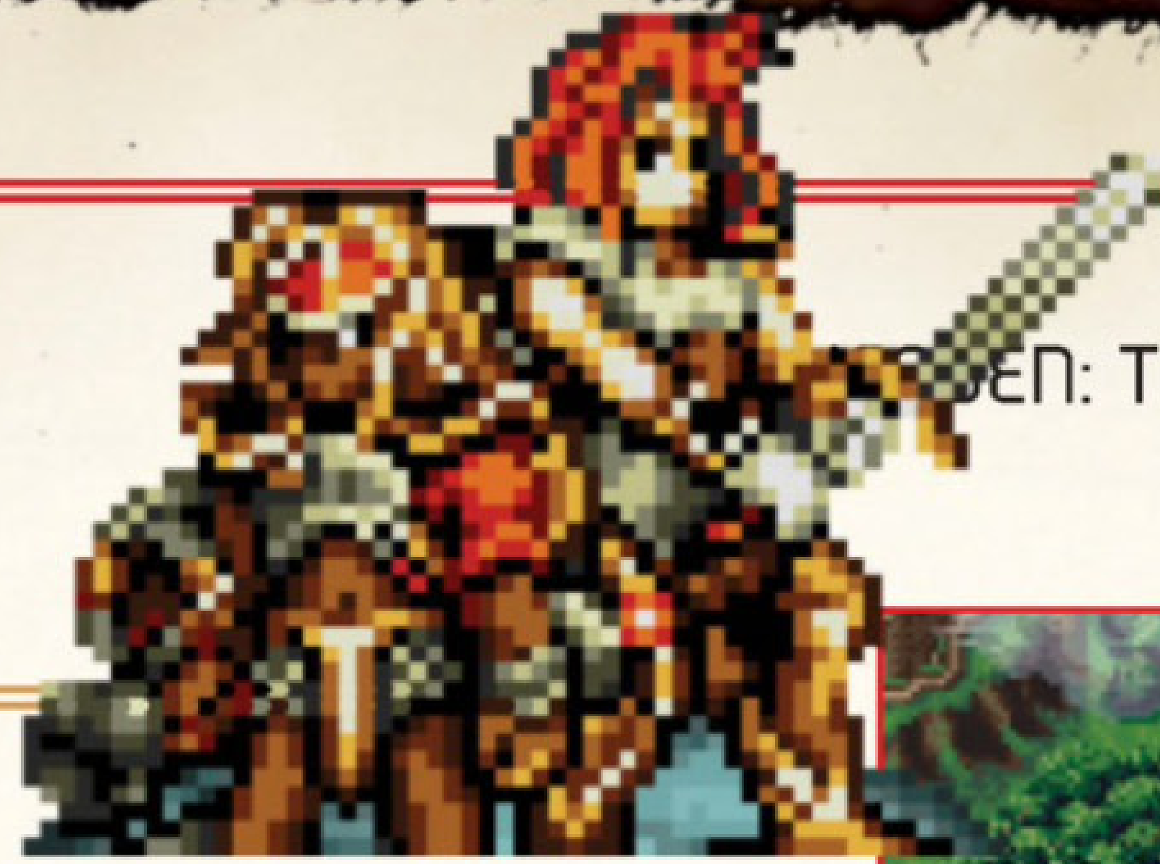


Illusion of Time

PUBLISHER: ENIX (JP) NINTENDO (WORLD) **DEVELOPER:** QUINTET **YEAR** 1993

Despite being another action RPG, *Illusion of Time* is quite a different beast to many similar games. Eschewing many staples of the genre, such as experience points, currency or equipment, *Illusion of Time* centres around Will and his alter egos in a plot to uncover the secrets of the Tower of Babel. Like *Terranigma*, the world is based loosely on Earth and features many locations such as The Great Wall of China and the Egyptian Pyramids. After adventuring to the Tower of Babel with his father, disaster strikes and Will returns to the village alone with no recollections of what happened. The game begins in earnest when Will gains the ability to make his first of two transformations. Will does have the ability to increase his power by collecting jewels dropped when clearing a room of enemies, but this unique skill can only be done once per room. It all makes for a highly novel adventure.

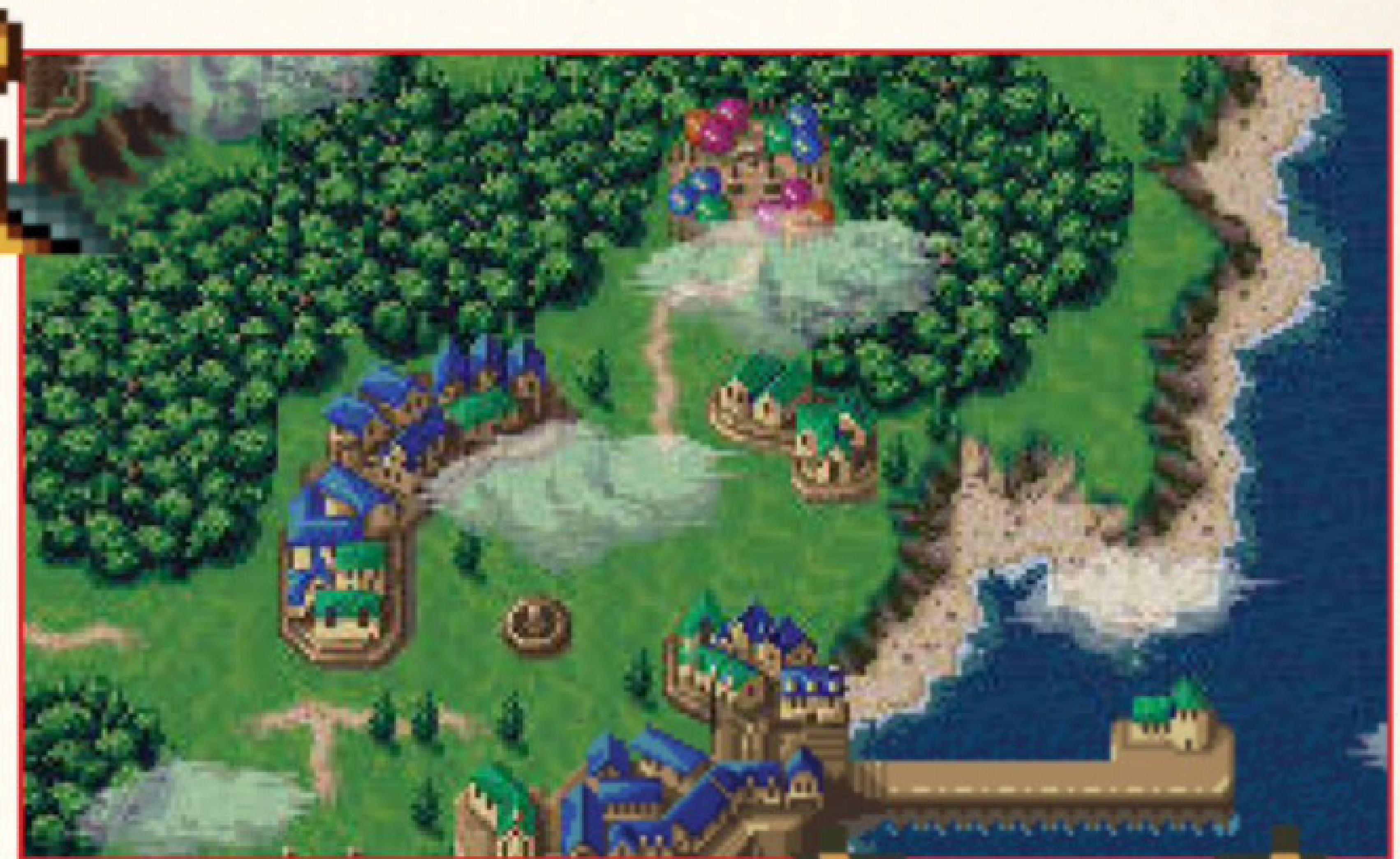




Ogre Battle

PUBLISHER: ENIX **DEVELOPER:** QUEST **YEAR:** 1995

One of the most important things about *Ogre Battle* is that it launched one of the most successful careers in Japan, namely Yasumi Matsuno, who went on to create several mega hits, two of which scored 40/40 in *Famitsu*. The other most important thing is that it's also an excellent strategy RPG, although it plays out more like an RTS title, such as *Command & Conquer*, upon entering battle. *Ogre Battle* has plenty of depth when preparing for combat. It features a tarot card system that can be used to add certain effects at certain times. There's an alignment system that's a play on the good/evil theme, a day/night cycle that affects how certain classes or cards react in fights and more than 70 different classes of units to control. Set to a gripping, politically motivated plot and boasting some lovely visuals, *Ogre Battle* comes highly recommended to those that like a good challenge.









Secret of Evermore

PUBLISHER: SQUARE **DEVELOPER** IN-HOUSE **YEAR:** 1995

In 1995, Super Nintendo fans were hugely anticipating *Secret of Mana 2*. Instead they got *Secret of Evermore*, a game developed by a team in America that Square had set up solely for creating it.

After the initial disappointment that *Mana 2* was not coming, *Secret of Evermore* turned out to be an excellent take on the *Mana* gameplay system, but with a contemporary setting in America. The plot is based around time travel and involves an unnamed boy and his dog while featuring plenty of clever B-movie references. What we love about *Secret of Evermore* is that it is packed with interesting ideas. Each region has a different currency, which can be converted at certain vendors and as you travel to each time zone, your dog takes on a different form relevant to that zone. Magic is based around alchemy, so you have to create your spells before you can cast them. The dog can also be used to sniff out ingredients for you, delivering another nice touch in a game that's littered with them.







Chrono Trigger

PUBLISHER: SQUARESOFT **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE **YEAR:** 1995

This epic RPG was developed by Squaresoft and featured a creative team that had fans of the genre salivating. Hironobu Sakaguchi, the creator of *Final Fantasy*; Yuji Horii, creator of long-term rival Enix's *Dragon Quest*; and Akira Toriyama, artist of *Dragon Ball Z* and *Dragon Quest*, were all lead designers on the project. This led to *Chrono Trigger* being massively anticipated by Japanese and Western RPG fans alike. We're pleased to say this masterpiece delivered on all counts.

The first thing you notice about the game is the very *Dragon Ball Z*-style art. It's striking compared to the sombre styling of *Final Fantasy VI*. Characters have wild spiky hair, colours are vivid but retain a realistic style that sits somewhere between other popular Squaresoft games.

On the surface, *Chrono Trigger* seems like any other Japanese RPG, however it contains several important innovations that set it apart from them. The first of these is the complete elimination of random battles and the separate battle plain. Enemies are visible at all times, so once you come into contact with one the battle begins and plays out on the same screen, rather than cutting to a battle map. This helps to not only avoid the frustration of random encounters, but also allows the level of immersion into the world to remain high without the jarring change of scenery.

The next major innovation is its many multiple endings. *Chrono Trigger* features no fewer than 14 different endings to discover, many of them accessible through the excellent new Game Plus feature that's now standard on many of today's games.

Throughout the game, lead character Crono travels across various time zones ranging from 65000000BC to 2300AD. This gave the developers a real freedom to create very diverse and interesting locations, ranging from the dinosaur-infested forests of the past to the malfunctioning domes of the future. The story itself is excellent with intriguing enemies, genuine heart-felt moments and a great translation that still stands up today.

Chrono Trigger is a masterpiece of game design and it hasn't aged at all since it was first released in 1995. Anyone with even a passing interest in the genre should check it out immediately. Just be aware that it's a little on the pricey side now.



Super Mario RPG

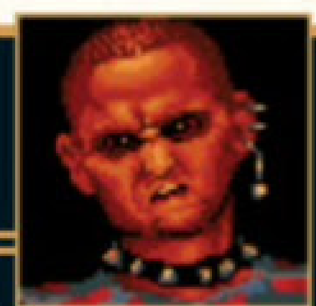
PUBLISHER: NINTENDO **DEVELOPER:** SQUARESOFT **YEAR:** 1996 (NTSC)

Super Mario RPG is a landmark title in many different ways. On the one hand it was a stunning collaboration between Nintendo and Square, but on the other it was one of the last Square-developed titles on a Nintendo platform for some time.

The first thing new players should do when starting the game is to watch the brilliant Attract mode. This gives players a great idea of the sheer amount of superb ideas that have been crammed into it. Featuring a mix of action platforming and turn-based combat, *Super Mario RPG* is a fast-paced, absorbing adventure, which is incredibly accessible to even the most novice of RPG fans. Visually the game looks 32-bit, as it features similar rendering techniques to *Donkey Kong Country* and a distinctive 3D isometric viewpoint. The music is suitably twee but never annoying as expected from now industry legend, Yoko Shimomura.

If there is one thing that *Super Mario RPG* does so well, it's that it highlights Squaresoft in its prime and how big a deal it was when Nintendo finally lost the talented developer to Sony.

Shadowrun



PUBLISHER: DATA EAST/LASER BEAM **DEVELOPER:** BEAM SOFTWARE **YEAR:** 1993

One of the most unique titles on the SNES, *Shadowrun* combines action RPG-style gameplay with elements of the point-and-click genre that was popular on computers at the time. Set in the not-too-distant future, your task as Jake Armitage is to track down your missing identity and to find the person that wants you dead. The cyberpunk setting feels very fresh on the console, the isometric visual style is nicely detailed, while the music is suitably matched and well composed. Piecing together the plot is a hugely compelling experience, while talking to NPCs opens up new conversational opportunities to help you through this more adult of Super Nintendo RPGs.



Secret of Mana



PUBLISHER: SQUARESOFT **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE **YEAR:** 1993

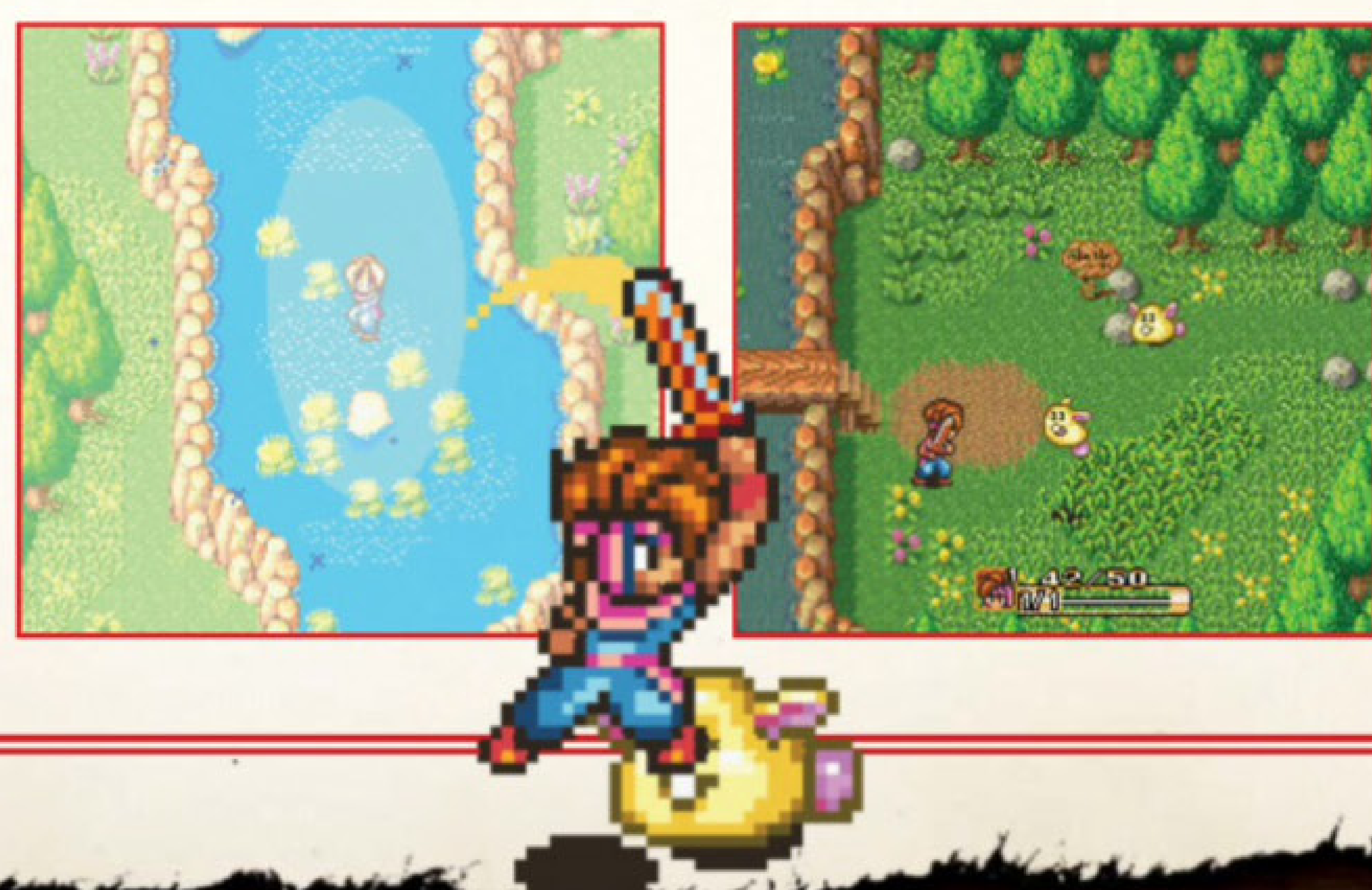
Secret of Mana is a hugely popular action RPG and for good reason. Squaresoft's game features sumptuous graphics, incredible music and a stunning three-player mode that instantly made it stand apart from other RPGs of the time.

First released in 1993 and a follow up to the Game Boy classic *Mystic Quest*, *Secret Of Mana* captivated audiences from the get go. It tells a simple story of a young boy who discovers a mysterious sword that he pulls, Arthur-like, from solid stone. It turns out that Mana, the lifeblood of the land, is being drained by the enemy in order to control the world; leaving the hero to energise the failing Mana Sword and hopefully restore balance to the land.

Visually, *Secret of Mana* is stunning, with some of the best visuals to be seen on a 16-bit system at the time. Locations are diverse, ranging from desert plateaus, bustling villages and evergreen forests, with Upperland being a standout location, as you literally walk through the forest as the seasons change from one to the next. Sonically the game doesn't disappoint either. The music in the opening sequence is still one of the most stunning in gaming, even today. Using sampled pipes, bass and various synthesised sounds among others, *Secret of Mana*'s soundtrack is diverse, often beautiful, yet dark and dramatic when it needs to be.

At its core, it's an action RPG featuring character levels, weapon levels and magic levels. Eight weapons are available to the player, which can be upgraded throughout the adventure. Magic too comes in eight forms and covers a variety of traditional elements. The biggest aspect of the game, however, is that it can be played by up to three players using a multi-tap. This is something that has rarely been done since, which is disappointing, as it completely takes a usually solitary experience and livens it up immensely. On the downside, when in single player the AI can cause a few minor issues, although its behaviour can be adjusted. Ultimately though, *Secret of Mana* is another classic RPG for Nintendo's 16-bit console.









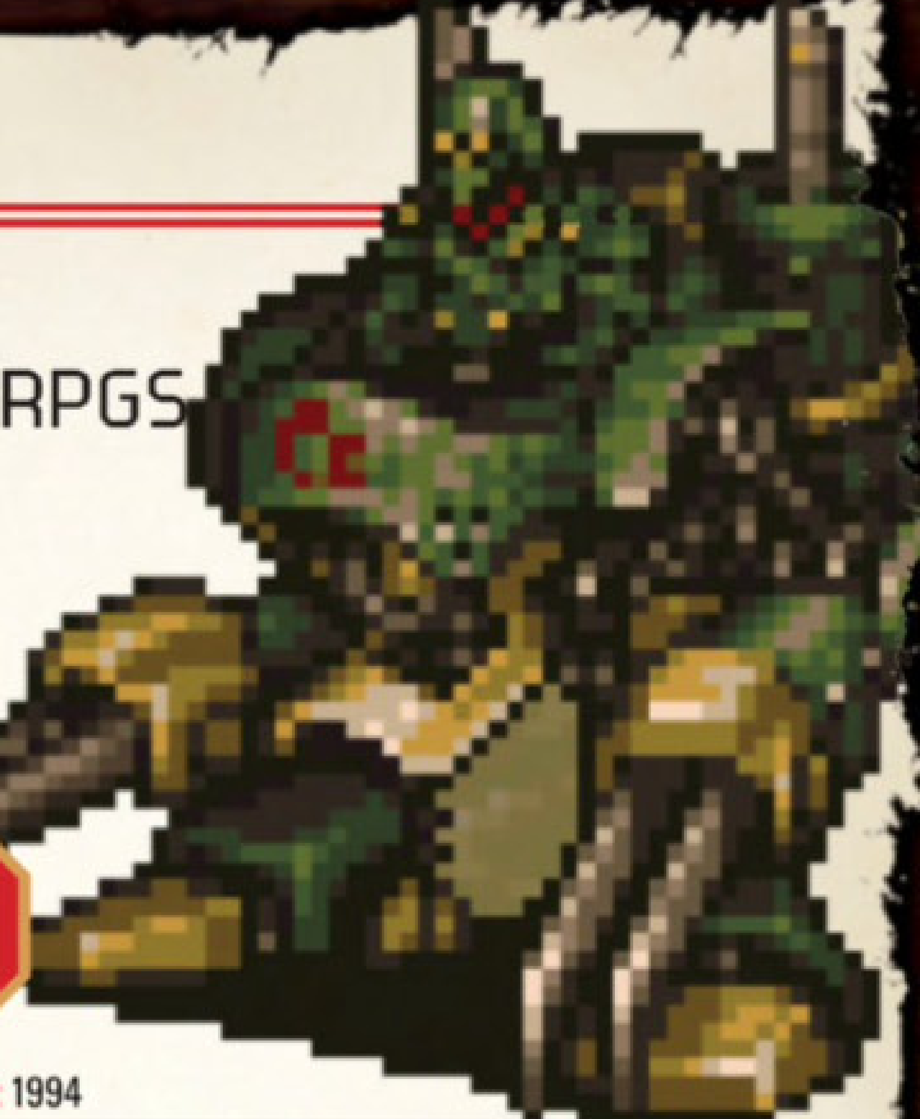
Earthbound

PUBLISHER: NINTENDO **DEVELOPER:** HAL/APE **RELEASE:** 1994

Earthbound is certainly one of the most interesting titles for the Super Nintendo. On the surface it appears to be fairly simplistic, but the more time spent with it, the more you realise just how unique it actually is. In fact, there's nothing else quite like it on any 16-bit console.

Set in modern-day America, *Earthbound* is a Japanese take on the American lifestyle with often-hilarious results. It tells the story of Ness and his friends and their adventure to defeat the evil Giygas, the leader of an alien invasion on planet Earth.

The graphics have a simple but extremely charming style to them, coming across like a cute Saturday morning cartoon. The world itself is presented in a pseudo-3D style and is completely seamless from one location to the next which is very uncommon within the actual genre. The fighting system is generally standard, but the actions of characters during fights will leave players grinning from ear to ear, as they're so entertaining. Despite a fairly slow pace, *Earthbound* is an incredibly charming and wacky game that deserves to be played through. It's now available on Virtual Console, meaning you'll no longer have to shell out over £500 for the original game.



Final Fantasy VI

PUBLISHER: SQUARESOFT **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE **RELEASE:** 1994

Leading up to the release of *Final Fantasy VI*, Squaresoft was building a massive reputation in the RPG scene. Enix, developer of *Dragon Quest*, was the most popular in Japan at the time, but *Final Fantasy VI* certainly marked a shift in Square's favour. It was simply an astonishing package, which was wonderfully ambitious with its storytelling and dark themes. Couple this with glorious visuals and a critically acclaimed soundtrack and it's no wonder *Final Fantasy VI* is often heralded as the best game in the series by American and Japanese audiences.

The plot is quite dark and at times even depressing, as you work your way through the many areas of the game, meeting hundreds of interesting characters along the way. The central character of the story is a young girl called Terra. When you first meet her she has been brainwashed by the evil empire and is being controlled in order to attack Espers (magical beings) and wipe them out. Once free of the empire, Terra goes on a journey of discovery to find out where she is from and rediscover her forgotten memories. Along the way some absolutely magnificent characters are met: Shadow the ninja with his trusty canine sidekick Interceptor; Edgar, the King Of Figaro, who has an eye for the ladies; Ultros who is apparently octopus royalty; and Kefka, the antagonist of the game and none other than a court jester! Kefka aims to defeat the Espers to take control of the magic and indeed the world. It's the duty of the player to stop him. Along the way, themes of love, regret, isolation, desperation and many others are carefully explored. Squaresoft did an excellent job with such a deep plot and it still impresses today.

Plot aside, *Final Fantasy VI* plays out much like traditional Japanese RPG with active turn-based combat and plenty of random battles. With 14 playable characters and masses of customisation, it's an all-time classic that is climbing in price and desirability.





Seiken Densetsu 3

PUBLISHER: SQUARESOFT **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE **YEAR:** 1995

Despite never being released outside of Japan, *Seiken Densetsu 3* has built up a huge following over the years, with many fans that are still desperate for an official translation. There are many reasons for this, but the most obvious are its graphics, which are achingly beautiful and easily sit alongside some of the best 32-bit 2D RPGs.

Like its predecessor, *Secret of Mana*, *Seiken Densetsu 3* is an action RPG with deep combat and a multiplayer option, although it only supports two players. It's packed with many unique features, however, including a branching story arc, absolutely huge bosses and a day-and-night cycle with each day based on an element that affects magic as a result. *Seiken Densetsu 3* never made it to the West because of a few technical problems in the game's code, but it has been translated by fans and is fully playable in English, although sourcing a Japanese copy is still worth doing.







ROAD

Was it really as simple as Super Hang-On with fighting, or was it so much more? Adam Barnes looks back at EA's motorbike racing game to discover what truly made it stand out



Considering videogames' penchant for violence, it seems like such an unusual thing to praise *Road Rash* for – but among its stablemates this was perhaps the element that most stood out. Sega's own *OutRun* and *Hang-On* had already been pinching pennies from addicted gamers in the arcades, so when they finally came over to the Mega Drive it was only natural they'd be met with something of a furore. Even Taito's arcade racer, *Chase HQ*, and its predecessor, *Full Throttle*, had set something of a standard for this particular breed of into-the-screen racer, so when EA wanted to bring its own take on the thrills of motorbike racing, it needed to pull out all the stops. It didn't have the arcade heritage, after all, so *Road Rash* needed something to stand out, it needed something advantageous to become a critical and commercial success.

By the time of its 1991 release on the Mega Drive, *Road Rash* already had a template with which to concern itself. While racing against other

ROGUE'S GALLERY

Meet the various rivals looking to put you on the ground





» [Mega Drive] There was a sense of place and scale to *Road Rash* that most racing games didn't seem to have. It felt like you were heading into the horizon, rather than a static backdrop.

competitors you would need to navigate the various bends and trials of the US highways. As with *Super Hang-On* the trick was in the careful manipulations as you turned, ensuring each corner was taken at the perfect combination of speed and correct angle. *Road Rash* mimicked that sensation elegantly, but the thing that made it feel so *different* wasn't nearly as graceful. Among the various challenges you'd encounter – such as the oncoming traffic and the corners – the addition of vehicular combat added a whole new dimension. Riders could kick and punch each other, lowering their stamina and their ability to stay atop their bikes, opening a whole new element to the racing genre. Rather than most combat games where the environment was stationary, here, with *Road Rash*, it was ever changing, and how you could react to your opponents was affected completely by your situation. Notice an oncoming car? Well that's the perfect opportunity to launch a rival into its path, timing your shunt *just* right to put them out of the race. Not permanently, of course, but it was an advantage all the same. Or how about slightly nudging them closer to the edge of a particularly sharp corner, causing them to careen off the track onto the rough terrain and (most likely) into a passing tree or road sign. It brought a whole new level to the racing genre, and helped solidify the game's status as a must-have.



» [Mega Drive] After completing a race you were given a race results screen which depicted your crew of Rashers hanging out together at a pit stop of some kind.

» [Mega Drive] To proceed to the next level you had to place at least fourth or better in the difficult races.



But there was more to it than that. Where other racers of the time had implemented hills and undulations in their tracks, none matched *Road Rash*'s physics system. An incline would slow the bike allowing for a very realistic feel to the bikes themselves. It allowed for truly exciting races as you barrelled down a hillside and sped around a bend, and the physics even enabled you to hop over the peaks of certain hills and launch yourself high into the air. The added challenge of having to adapt your turning while doing so on an incline was something of a revelation at the time. This was *Road Rash*'s advantage: while *Super Hang-On*'s sense of speed was a thrill, it was artificial. Even *Chase HQ*'s use of bumps had little impact on your actual speed, which made *Road Rash* feel all the more compelling.

But where *Chase HQ* had you playing as the good guys – the right side of the law – *Road Rash* stayed

> "It brought a whole new level to the racing genre, and helped solidify its status as a must have"

in keeping with its renegade street racer appeal. Here, the police were a threat, a means of weeding out the weaker players not able to keep up, or punishing the lax racers unable to ride safely. It wasn't common to be arrested early on in the game, but as the difficulty in stages ramped up, it became as hard to stay on the track – and, therefore, your bike – as it was to shake the increasingly tougher rivals and police force. By the end, having not seen the failure screen prompt 'Busted!!!' would have been something of a feat.

Road Rash being released on the Mega Drive was something of a necessity, then. The console was capable of the higher speed calculations that were really needed to match the arcade feel that EA had so clearly wanted to recreate, and that sense of speed couldn't have happened elsewhere. Electronic Arts was emboldened by its successes on the Mega Drive, yet it was *Road Rash* that advertised what was capable on the machine. While Sega would focus on its own *Super Hang-On* – and the title's arcade heritage meant that was a safe bet for the console manufacturer – gamers in the know would flock to EA's motorbike racing game. The popularity imbued further success for the thriving developer and publisher, but it also lead to expansion for the franchise. Sequels were expected, but the original itself saw it ported to a heap of different platforms from the technically comparable but much slower Amiga version or the considerably weaker portable versions on Game Gear and Game Boy. The 1994 3DO version was the real treat, however, featuring a truly 3D rendering system that – pre-PlayStation – was something of a technical achievement. Its cheesy live action video opening – even ▶



» [Mega Drive] There were five tracks each themed on specific Routes in California. As you progressed through the levels, these tracks became longer and harder.



» [Mega Drive] There's something immensely satisfying about taking a club to an opponent's head and watching them fall off their bike.

BIKER HEAVEN

The eight bikes that will make you king of the road



SHURIKEN 400

■ As the starting bike, you can imagine it wasn't particularly quick, but it at least was good for keeping you on the road and therefore a pretty easy bike to begin the game with.



PANDA 600

■ This was a bit of a vague upgrade, really, offering only a improvement to your starting bike in terms of power. For the cost, most players realised it was better to ignore it.



BANZAI 750

■ It's likely you'd have wanted this option when you reach the second level of stages. Its speed meant you could keep up, but it was tricky to maintain that speed around corners.



KAMIKAZE 750

■ It was either the Banzai 750 or the Kamikaze 750, the latter of which was heavier and tough to get around corners. Acceleration was better, but you'd have to brake more to survive a race.



SHURIKEN 1000

■ The heavy weight of this bike made it lumbersome to survive quicker, sharper turns; its speed often sending you off the track. Most favoured bikes with better accuracy.



FERRUCI 850

■ The combination of high speed and great handling made this desirable, but you had to be good – it took skill to keep it on the track and couldn't handle very many crashes.



PANDA 750

■ The penultimate upgrade that only offered marginal improvements to speed and handling over the Ferruci 850. If you have the Ferruci, it was worth saving cash and ignoring this one.

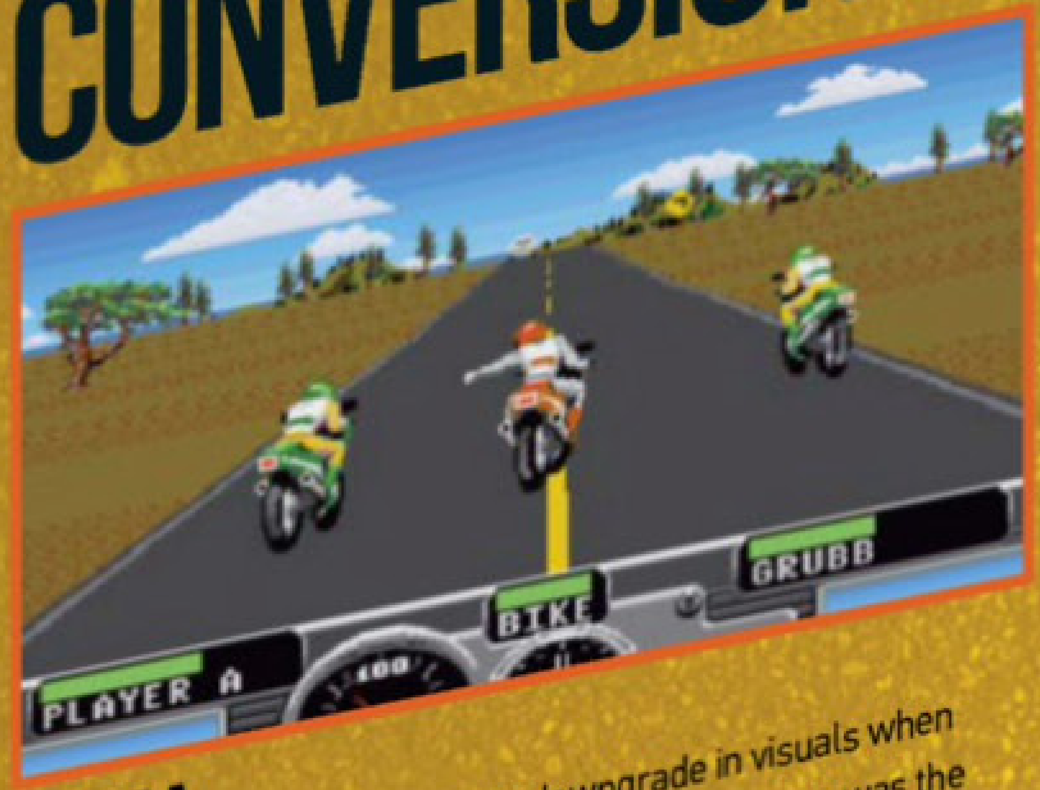


DIABLO 1000

■ The fastest, nimblest bike available but at an incredibly steep price. You wouldn't get this until later in the game, and even then you needed to be smart about braking to survive.

CONVERSIONS

Road Rash didn't just appear on Sega's Mega Drive…



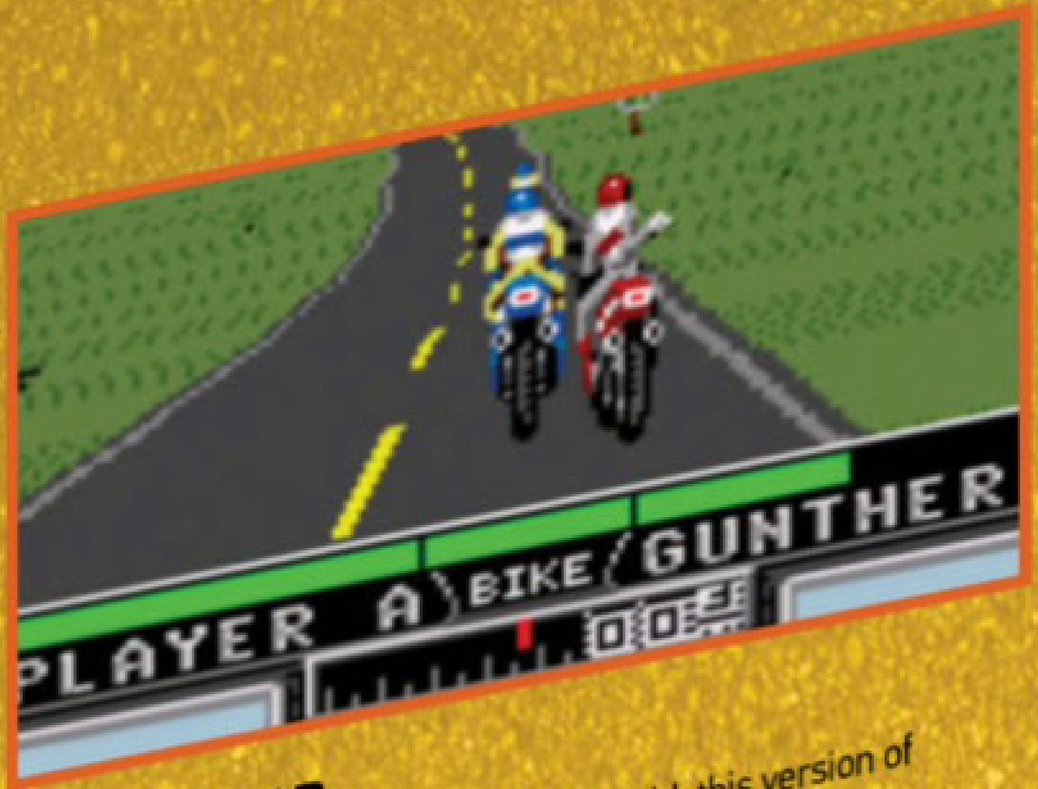
AMIGA

■ Though there was only a slight downgrade in visuals when *Road Rash* was brought over to Amiga, the real issue was the pace. The mechanics remained as slick as ever, but it was a much slower racing game than the quick Mega Drive original – thus losing some of that high speed manic magic.



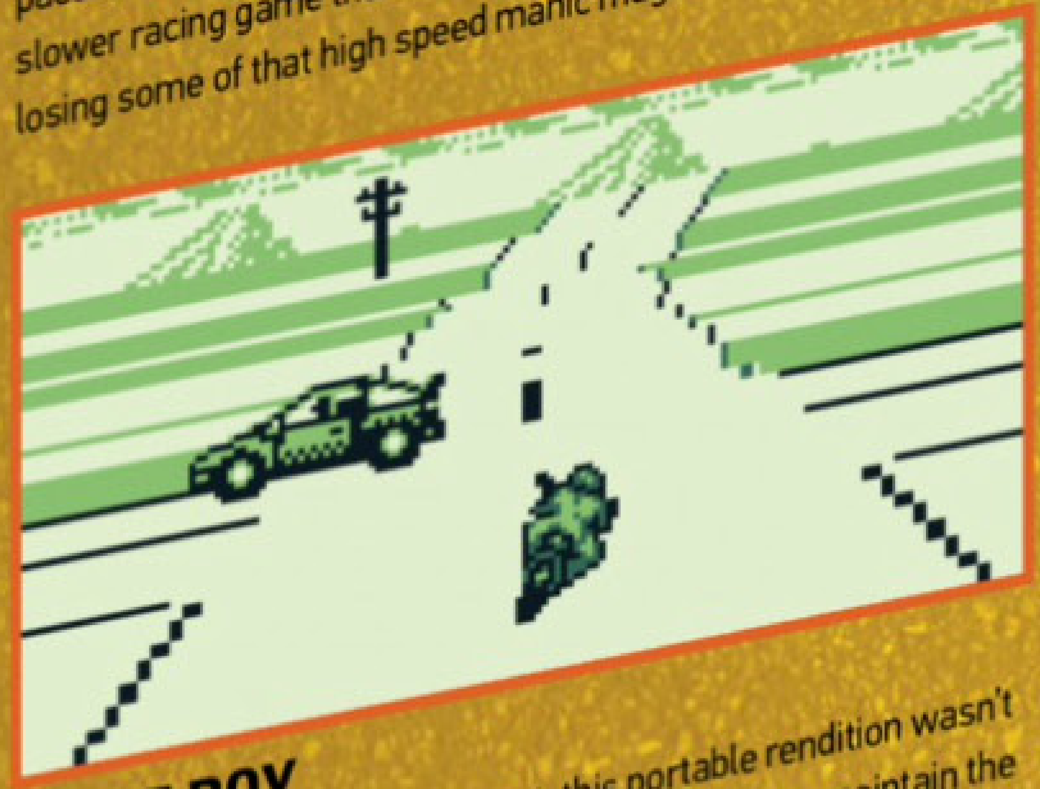
MASTER SYSTEM

■ For the most part, everything remained intact for the Master System version, but weaker visuals meant it didn't look the part compared to its more high-powered counterpart. Often you'd vault into the air, too, highlighting this version's inability to present your speed to you in a way its precursor had.



GAME GEAR

■ As you might expect for Sega's handheld, this version of *Road Rash* struggled to replicate that overall 3D design of its counterparts. It still maintained a very stable, solid core experience, though, and it was a commendable effort considering the limited hardware it was on.



GAME BOY

■ Unlike its Game Gear equivalent, this portable rendition wasn't quite as enjoyable. It was understandably difficult to maintain the visuals on the Game Boy's monochrome screen, but worse still were the controls which made it extremely slow and unwieldy to play. This is one to avoid, if we're honest.



SEGA CD

■ By utilising the big storage capabilities of the disc it arrived on, the Sega CD version of *Road Rash* brought with it cutscenes (as was the case with many Sega CD games) and some improved visuals. There was even a set of backing tracks replacing the chiptune with drums, guitars and even vocals.



3DO

■ For the effort involved this may well have been considered a sequel, but having been named simply '*Road Rash*' the distinguish is hard to make. It brought over the live action videos of the Sega CD version but added them to a whole new 3D engine that, for its time, was phenomenal and caused jaws to drop.

> "By the time the 3DO version was ported to PC interest had already begun to wear thin"

ROAD RASH SEQUELS

Every game in the rough-and-tumble franchise

ROAD RASH II

■ The quick turnaround of this sequel – it came only a year after the original – meant that there wasn't much new to the experience; more bikes, more environments, the inclusion of split-screen multiplayer, and improvements to the menu navigation issues of the original meant this was about as complete a package as it needed to be. It also added the now-iconic chain weapon to the foray.



ROAD RASH 3: TOUR DE FORCE

■ Once again appearing on the Mega Drive – this time in 1995 – this version brought with it seven different locations across the world, upgradable bikes and a collection of different weapons – now eight in total – to round out the combat experience of the game by even allowing you to carry multiple weapons.





ROAD RASH 3D

■ This PlayStation game was more of an upgraded version of the 3DO version and maintained the sense of speed that the series had been known for. Combat was pared down slightly, but the stronger opponents meant that the brawling could go on for much longer. It lacked many fancy extras, but it got the experience just right.



» [Mega Drive] Police officers were a much bigger threat in later levels and – much like many of the AI rivals – differed in how aggressive they were.

replete with Soundgarden's *Rusty Cage* as a backing track – might've done enough to sell the concept to excited fans, but it was the in-game graphics that really blew players away.

By now there's probably something of a question to ask: *Road Rash* really was one of the better racing games of its time, so what happened to EA's stalwart motorbike game? Well the answer comes along with examples its brethren, too, the likes of *OutRun* and *Super Hang-On* that – ever since the Mega Drive – haven't really maintained the same success. EA, of course, made sequels to *Road Rash*, but the move to 3D was not particularly a good one for the series. *Road Rash II* arrived a year later on the Mega Drive with little more than a split-screen multiplayer feature – rather than the turn-by-turn method of the original – a handful of new bikes and a chain to use as a weapon. After that came *Road Rash 3: Tour De Force* in 1995, but again offered the same again, yet with different locations from across the world. By the time the 3DO version was ported to PC and a new 3D PS1 game was released in 1998, interest had already begun to wear thin and the new PlayStation era was a tough bridge for the series to cross. Crashes became impossible, instead you'd experience illogical ricochets after hitting a car or other obstacle, and while weapons would still feature, it became a much less important aspect to the franchise. The original *Road Rash* may well have been a product of its time, but its violence was as much its identity as its motorbikes. Sure, it was a simple addition to make – but it brought something completely new to the genre that would brand itself on the minds of Mega Drive owners everywhere. It is funny how a simple spot of violence can get gamers excited. ★



ROAD RASH 64

■ As impressive as the character and bike models had been for the N64 version, it still managed to look rather ugly – especially if you got out in front with nothing but the open road for company. Combat was especially weak here, while the driving itself didn't manage to achieve the right balance of speed and tactility.



ROAD RASH JAILBREAK

■ The PS1's *Jailbreak* offered much better visuals than its N64 equivalent, but a sort of silliness that the series hadn't really been known for. Combat remained weak, however, though it did allow for some power attacks that were fun to use. A GBA port was released, too, that actually provided an experience very similar to the original.

IAN FISCH How *Road Rash* inspired *Road Redemption*

What was it you enjoyed about *Road Rash*?

I think that what makes *Road Rash* great is that it's a combat game where the environment is constantly changing, as opposed to if you play most third-person combat games these days it seems like you're essentially in a flat arena, like a wrestling ring almost, and you just fight everyone and the environment doesn't really come into play. But with *Road Rash* the environment really determines what you can do to your opponents.



Do you think violence was a big factor for the game's enjoyment?

Yeah, I think violence is always a big factor when it comes to action games. I mean, I understand that it doesn't necessarily directly affect gameplay, but if you're playing *Call Of Duty*, if you're not getting that big reaction when you shoot someone with the blood spurt and the dramatic death and if, for instance, you shot a laser and they just blinked out of existence it would take a lot of the fun and satisfaction away. And I think *Road Rash* is the same way.

Why did you decide to try and reboot this type of game with *Road Redemption* now?

There are some games that you can remake right now and all the technological advances we've made in videogames and computers isn't going to make the game necessarily better. For instance, any game that is primarily in 2D. I guess *Sonic The Hedgehog* might be a good example; you can make a new version of *Sonic* using modern 3D graphics but it's not going to really be the same game, and it's not even necessarily going to be better than the originals in 2D. Whereas *Road Rash* was always something where the technology hadn't quite caught up to the game's vision, in terms of having realistic physics, having a lot of cars and riders on the road, in terms of being able to run competent AI with all that going on.

Did you replay the original for inspiration during development?

Absolutely. We used it as a reference – which parts of the series worked and which parts didn't. What worked is the ways you can have these engagements with other riders, and we realised that's a hard thing to do. The original 2D games had you strafing back and forward in the screen and your enemies kind of glued to your space, in the 3D versions it's easy to do that, which is why they didn't rely on combat.



Minority Report

CLASSIC GAMES YOU'VE NEVER PLAYED



AMSTRAD GX4000

Amstrad's GX4000 is often mentioned among the worst consoles of all time. Although its reputation says otherwise, the system is actually home to some pretty decent games. So we sent Kieren Hawken to find out which ones are worthy of a mention…

PANG

■ DEVELOPER: OCEAN ■ YEAR: 1990

■ **PANG WAS ORIGINALLY** an arcade game that was developed by Mitchell Corporation and distributed by Capcom. It was also known as *Buster Bros.* and *Pomping World* in various regions and it has produced many clones, but we are focusing on this official conversion by Ocean to the failed Amstrad console, and what a conversion it is too!

Pang's basic gameplay owes a great deal to an even older arcade game: Atari's iconic *Asteroids*. This may not be obvious to see at first but the basic gameplay mechanic is very much the same. The object of this game is to use your harpoon gun to break up the bubbles bouncing around the screen until there is nothing left. Each time you break one it splits into smaller ones that are harder to hit; sound familiar now? Of course, *Pang* has various idiosyncrasies of its own but you can very much see where the designers drew their inspiration from. In fact the gameplay in *Pang* is actually identical to a much earlier 1983 Japanese computer game called *Cannon Ball* by Hudson Soft, which was also released for the ZX Spectrum in 1983 as *Bubble Buster*. Interestingly Hudson would later go on to publish the PC Engine version of *Pang*. There is no doubting that *Pang* is in fact a direct upgrade of the earlier game but no credit was ever given.

Pang features 50 levels in total that are set across 17 different locations. This plays out like a world tour with stages taking place in front of well-known landmarks such as Mount Fuji, Angkor Wat, Ayres Rock, Easter Island, the pyramids of Egypt, and it even takes in the sights of good old London town. The levels start off pretty simple, but as they go on various blocks and platforms appear that get in the way of the bubbles, changing how they bounce around the screen. Some of these blocks can be shot with your harpoon to get them out the way. Shooting the bubbles and blocks will sometimes reveal power-ups and bonuses that make your life much easier. As well as simple items like fruit that just give you more points, there are also some weapons on offer. These include things like multiple shots, shields, machine gun, freeze and a handy little hourglass that slows the speed of the bubbles down making them easier to hit. One touch from

"Pang's basic gameplay owes a great deal to an even older arcade game: Arari's iconic Asteroids"



» [GX4000] Shooting the bigger bubbles will cause them to split, which quickly crowds the playing area.

a bubble will cause your character to lose a life.

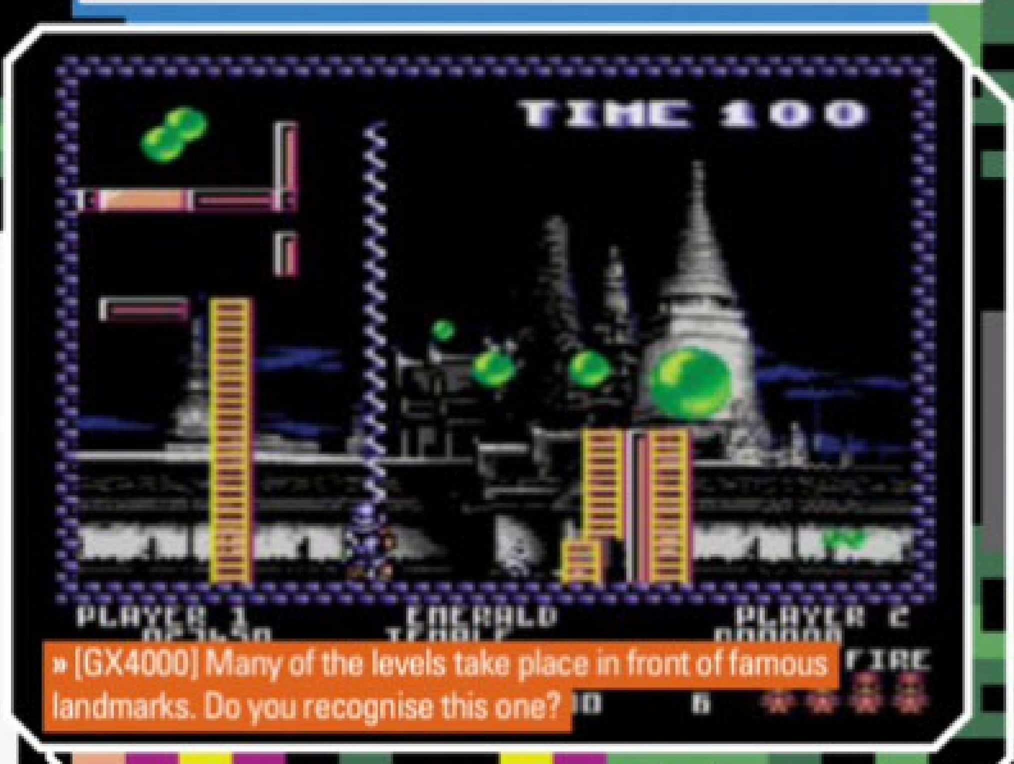
The best feature of *Pang*, however, is the superb two-player mode, allowing you and a friend to take on the bouncing bubbles simultaneously. With its attractive and highly colourful graphics, cheerful music and addictive gameplay there is no doubting that *Pang* is the best game on the machine. And who knows, with more games like *Pang* in the library the GX4000 might have stood half a chance in the already crowded console market of the early Nineties.



» [GX4000] The game provides a handy tutorial in the form of a nice intro sequence.

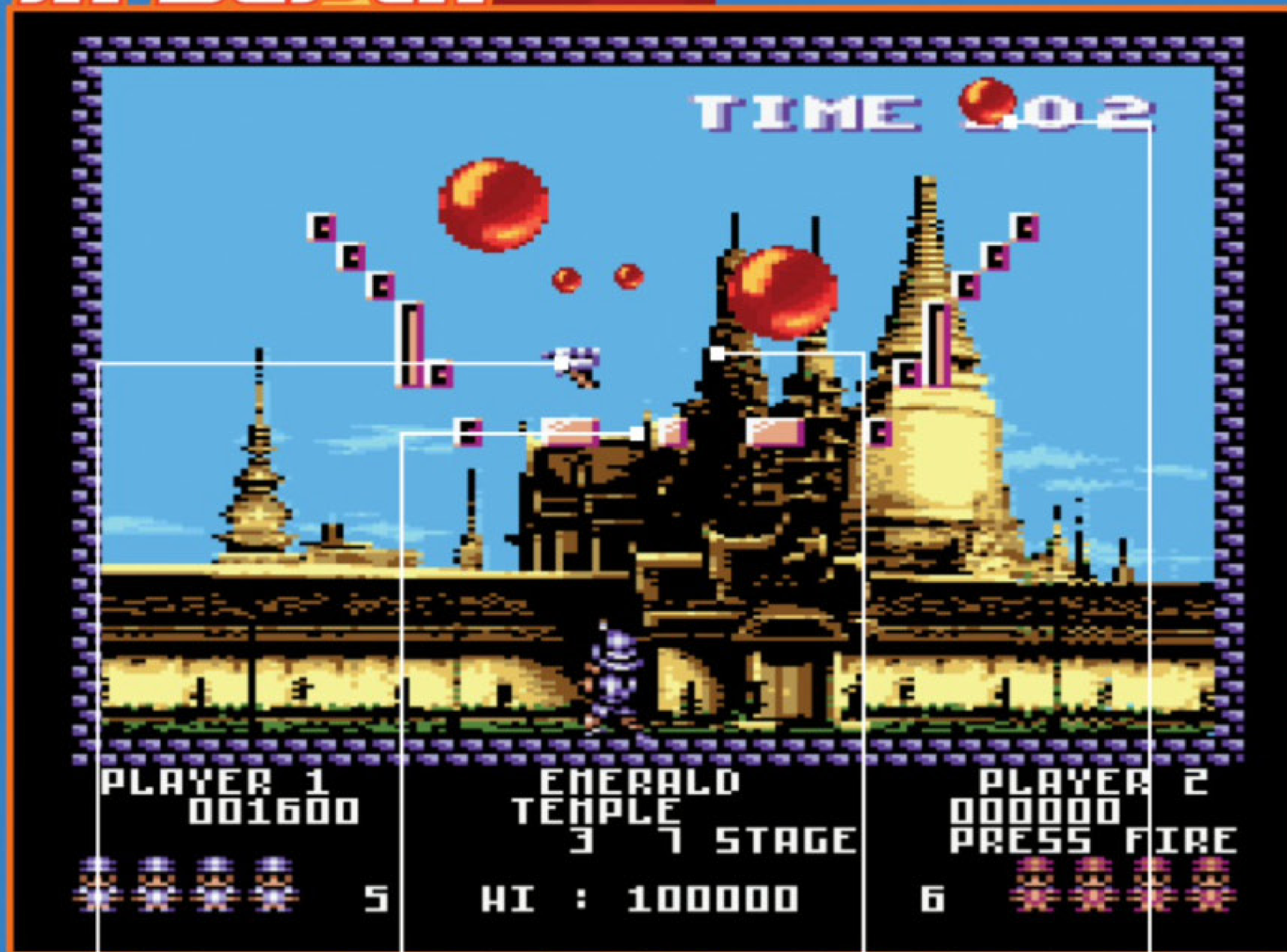


» [GX4000] Analysing the bounce of the bubbles is a key tactic to succeeding in this game.



» [GX4000] Many of the levels take place in front of famous landmarks. Do you recognise this one?

IN DEPTH



UPGRADE AVAILABLE

■ Grab the power-up to swap out your harpoon for a much better rapid-fire bubble bursting machine gun!

BLOCK ROCKING BEATS

■ Shoot the blocks out the way to let the bubbles fall down, making them easier to blast into smithereens.

HOLIDAY SNAPS

■ In the background you can see the rather picturesque ruins of Angkor Watt, one of the many notable locations to visit in the game.

CLOCK WATCHING

■ Make sure you keep an eye on the time, because if you let it run out, your bubble will burst for once and all, and nobody wants that.

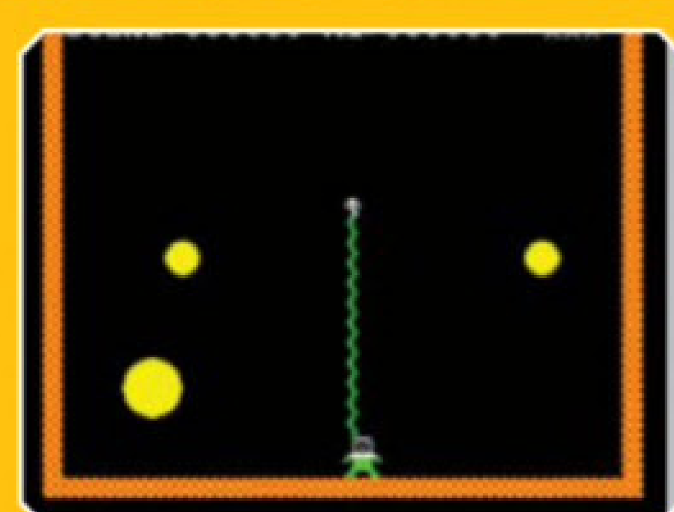
IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...



ASTEROIDS

VARIOUS

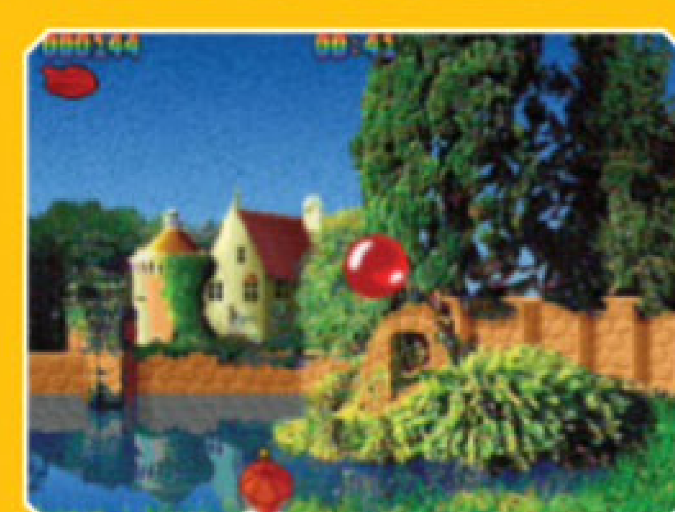
■ The 1979 arcade game by Atari feels like it has been converted to almost every system known to man in one form or another. The premise is exactly the same as *Pang*; clear the screen of objects by breaking them into smaller pieces. As the game goes on, the objects increase in number and speed making it tricky.



BUBBLE BUSTER

ZX SPECTRUM

■ Also known as *Cannon Ball* on the Sharp X1 and MSX computers, this is the true predecessor to *Pang*. It's basically the same game but without the backdrops or power-ups. This early Sinclair release does have a few issues but it is fun to play, and it's a mystery how it was forgotten about so quickly.



BLITZ

ACORN ARCHIMEDES

■ This game is a straight up clone of *Pang* in every respect, but it is a very nice one at that. The fancy backgrounds and sound effects really up the stakes on the presentation front, while keeping the core gameplay the same. If you are lucky enough to own one of the Acorn RISC machines then you should check this out.

Minority Report

SWITCHBLADE

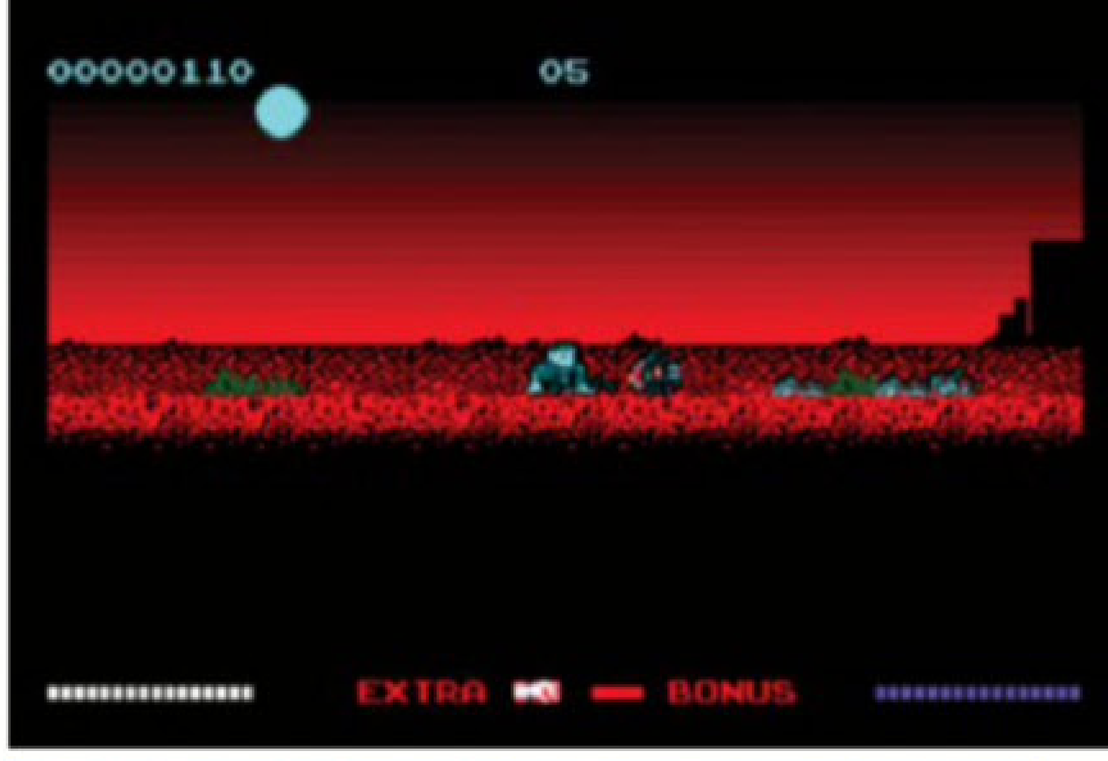
■ DEVELOPER: GREMLIN ■ YEAR: 1990

■ Gremlin didn't give a great deal of support to Amstrad's console but it did choose to publish one of its biggest hits of the time on the machine, to the delight of GX4000 owners everywhere. Designed by Simon Phipps at Core Design, this manga-inspired platform style adventure sees you take on the role of Hiro, a Japanese warrior on a mission to recover the 16 pieces of the Fireblade – a sacred symbol of the ancient Switchblade clan. Unlike many other games of its type, *Switchblade* doesn't scroll, you simply progress from one screen to the next; this seems a bit unnatural at first but you soon get used to it. You also have to upgrade your fighting power as the game goes on by finding weapons hidden in the various rooms among other useful items. The main upgrade here from the original CPC release is in the colour, making the game much closer to the 16-bit original. *Switchblade* is much deeper than many of the other games you will find on the machine and with its attractive graphics, great soundtrack and long-term playability it's considered one of the best game on the machine.

> **"Switchblade doesn't scroll, you simply progress from one screen to the next"**



» [GX4000] One you get inside the underground caverns all kinds of enemies await you.



» [GX4000] You begin the game by making your way through the wastelands.



» [GX4000] *Switchblade* starts off with a really nice intro sequence explaining the story.

MORE GAMES TO PLAY



» OPERATION THUNDERBOLT

■ DEVELOPER: OCEAN
■ YEAR: 1990

■ The sequel to the hugely popular *Operation Wolf*, *Operation Thunderbolt* is more of the same: shoot all of the enemies on the screen and progress to the next level. The main difference is that levels now go 'into' the screen as well as scrolling horizontally. While it's a decent conversion, it's a little too similar to the original Amstrad CPC release.



» KLAX

■ DEVELOPER: DOMARK/TENGEN
■ YEAR: 1990

■ *Klax* has more official home conversions than any arcade game ever, so it is no surprise to see it pop up on the GX4000. It's as addictive as ever and it has some really nice colourful graphics but it fails to improve on the original (and very good) CPC version in any shape or form. The lack of speech is probably the biggest bugbear here, and we are sure it wouldn't have been too difficult to include the feature in the game.



» BATMAN THE MOVIE

■ DEVELOPER: OCEAN
■ YEAR: 1990

■ It might not offer up any improvements over the original CPC tape and disk release but Mike Lamb's wonderful game, based on the 1989 reboot starring Michael Keaton and Jack Nicholson, is still a great title to own for the GX4000. The game consists of two platform-based stages, two driving sections and a puzzle-based mini-game.



» TENNIS CUP 2

■ DEVELOPER: LORICIEL
■ YEAR: 1990

■ The Amstrad GX4000 only has three sports games, so it seems incredibly strange that two of them are tennis games. Loriciel's game just beats out UbiSoft's *Pro Tennis Tour* to claim the grandslam title, mainly down to the more unique split screen gameplay. In the top half of the screen you see yourself, and in the bottom half you see your opponent. This works rather well and the range of shots is impressive.

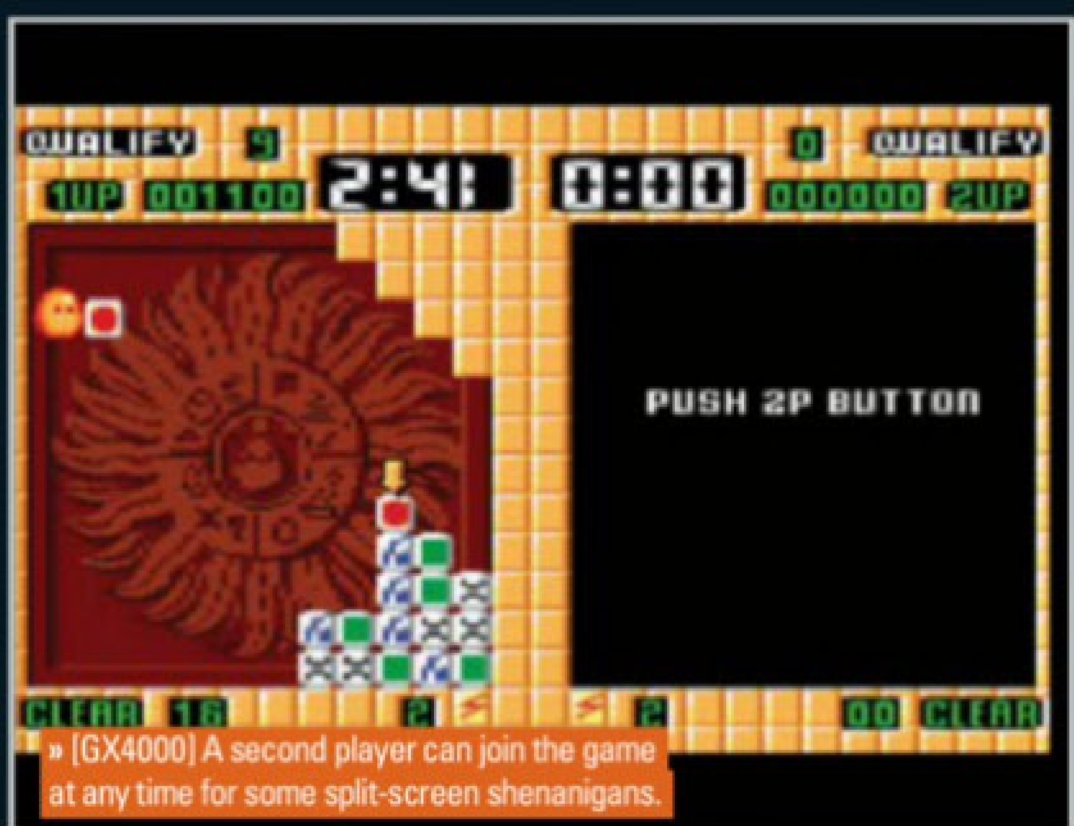
PLOTTING

■ DEVELOPER: OCEAN ■ YEAR: 1990

■ **ALTHOUGH THIS IS a conversion of a Taito arcade game, it's a pretty obscure one and might seem like a strange inclusion in the GX4000's Top 3.** *Plotting* is a title that we just keep coming back to, making it a must have game for the failed console. Also known as *Flipull*, the arcade game came out in 1989 with Ocean's home conversions arriving very shortly afterwards. The gameplay is very unique and requires you to bounce blocks off a wall to hit other blocks that contain the same symbol. Each level requires you to clear a set amount of different blocks and this is done against a time limit. On occasion a special block will be granted that acts like a wild card, allowing you to fire it at anything. Each level features a different arrangement of blocks and as the game goes on these become more complex. It's game over when either your time runs out or you don't have a move. *Plotting* is seriously addictive in one player mode and takes on a whole new lease of life in spilt screen mode against a second player. Don't let the simplistic looks put you off, *Plotting* is excellent fun.



» [GX4000] *Plotting* isn't the best known of arcade games, but it still received some great home ports.



» [GX4000] A second player can join the game at any time for some split-screen shenanigans.



RETRO STINKER

» NO EXIT

■ DEVELOPER:TOMAHAWK ■ YEAR: 1990

■ **This was an** utterly atrocious fighter, and we don't use that term often. The simplistic gameplay and rubbish controls coupled with tiny sprites make *No Exit* game the worst game on the machine.



» ROBOCOP 2

■ DEVELOPER: OCEAN
■ YEAR: 1990

■ **Robocop 2 is a** rare occurrence on the GX4000, a game that was only released on cartridge for the CPC+ range. It's quite similar in many ways to the original *Robocop* game by Ocean, it has a selection of different level types loosely connected to the film and all sewn together into one package. The graphics and sound are both very nice indeed, but there is one small let down in the rather brutal difficulty.



» FIRE & FORGET II

■ DEVELOPER: TITUS
■ YEAR: 1990

■ **What we have** here is a shameless rip-off of Atari's *RoadBlasters*, but a pretty good one at that. If you have played the more famous arcade game then you will be right at home here, drive down the roads at breakneck speeds shooting the enemies that get in your way. That's pretty much all there is to it, but Titus still managed to convey a good sense of speed with some decent graphics and sound on top.



» NAVY SEALS

■ DEVELOPER: OCEAN
■ YEAR: 1991

■ **Without doubt *Navy*** *Seals* is one of the most technically impressive games on the system. The graphics and sound can't be faulted and the game is really well designed, much like *Robocop 2*. But that is not the only thing Ocean copied across into this game, *Navy Seals* also has the same brutal difficulty. But if you are a seasoned gamer then you will certainly get a decent amount of play time out of Ocean's game.



» PANZA KICKBOXING

■ DEVELOPER: LORCIEL
■ YEAR: 1991

■ **This is *the*** best fighting game that's available on Amstrad's console. *Panza Kickboxing* goes for a realistic stance on the genre rather than the style of games like *Street Fighter II*. You have to train your fighter, and then progress up the ranks to a final title match again Andre Panza himself. The amount of moves on offer is huge and the graphics are gorgeous.

WARNING





IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
» **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
» **RELEASED:** 2002
» **PLATFORM:** GAMECUBE
» **GENRE:** SURVIVAL HORROR

THE MAKING OF

RESIDENT EVIL REMAKE



The true art of the remake is to strike a balance that can both appeal to legacy players and bring in a new generation. Back in 2002, Capcom managed just that by turning a cult PlayStation classic into a GameCube showpiece. Luke Albigés opens *that* door and enters the survival horror once more...



"RESIDENT EVIL REMAKE 101"

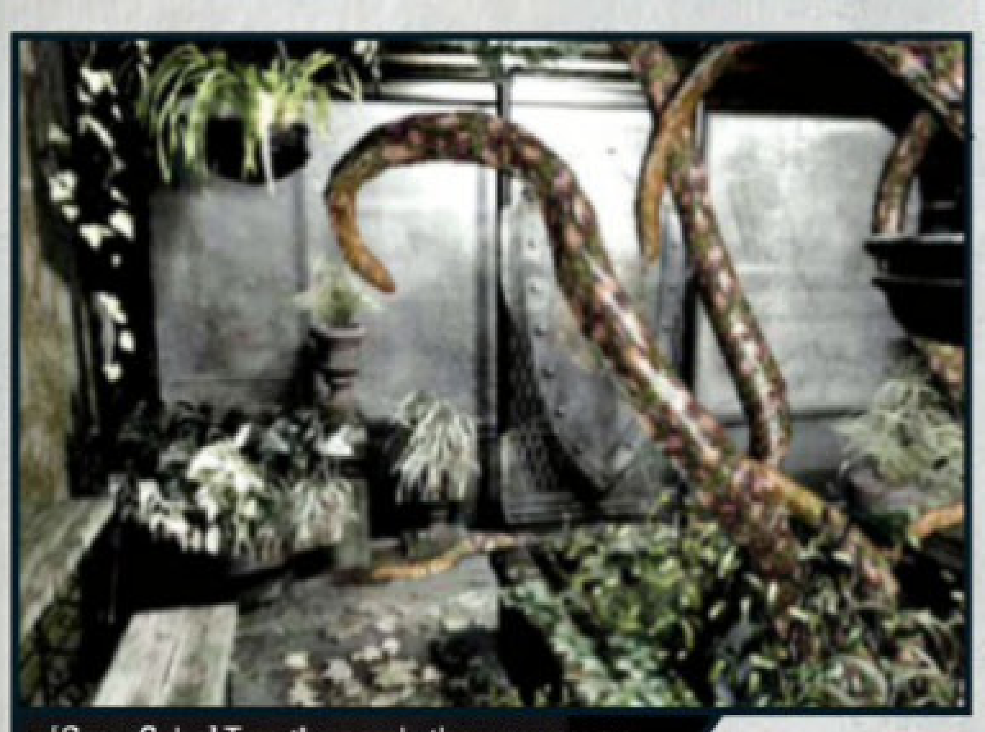
■ The original *Resident Evil* saw the player entering a mansion and avoiding the zombies contained within. It introduced many new players to the survival horror genre and taught gamers the mechanics of preserving ammo and item management over all out blasting. It proved such a success that Capcom remade it several times, most notably with the excellent Gamecube release which featured enhanced graphics and gameplay additions.

Try as it might to pretend otherwise, the original *Resident Evil* was a very silly game. It certainly didn't help that the cast's comical performances only managed to lend a Troma-esque triple serving of ham to proceedings. The haunted house setting and undead denizens was reduced to cheap sets and poorly underlit puppets when framed by dialogue that was so badly delivered it's incredible that it even reached its destination. Capcom would go on to refine both the cheesy dialogue and game design of the original further for the sequel, cementing this as a series with its roots in B-movie culture, but with mechanics that would blush at the very idea of keeping such company. If only there were a way to replace the worst parts of the game while still keeping the best bits and even building upon them... oh wait, there was.

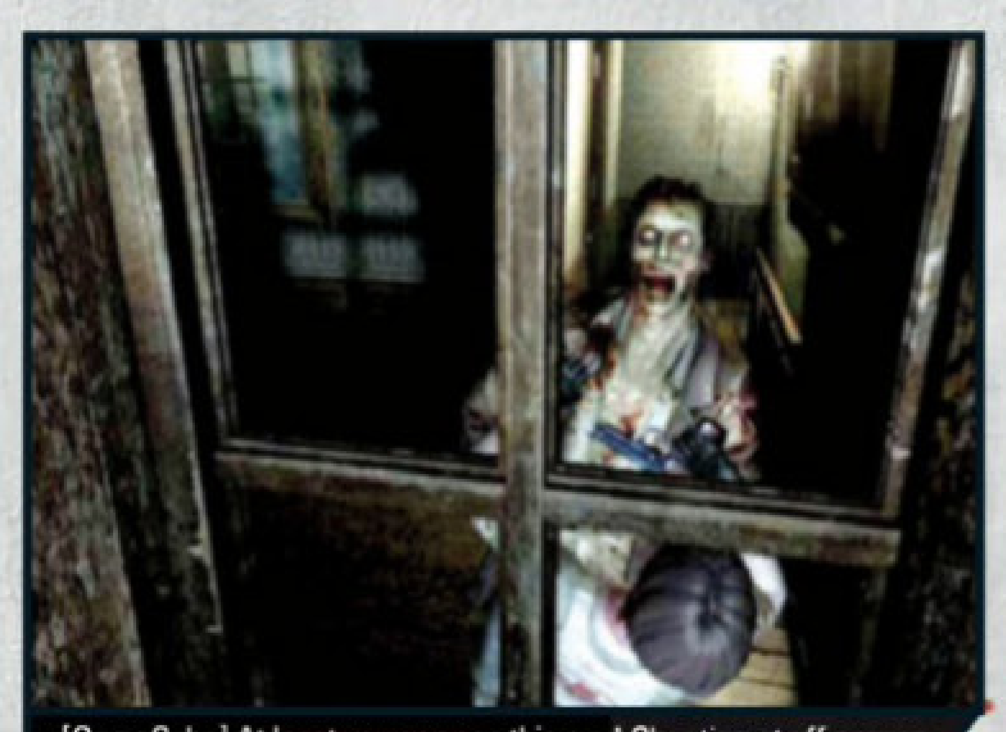
Remaking *Resident Evil* for GameCube wasn't simply a case of taking the entire original PlayStation game and making it look a bit better. Capcom was a good four games into the franchise at this point, and it had a hell of a job to do in trying to convince the world that the game on which these pillars were built was more than just a daft B-movie horror experiment that happened to go right. "The decision to create a remake on the GameCube was made by Shinji Mikami," says producer Hiroyuki Kobayashi, and it was the right play. Between recasting all the characters with actors who could actually act, and using the new tech to build on the foundations of the original, the team managed to create an experience that felt less like a remake but more like how you remembered the original experience the first time around. It was a thing of beauty, and it's no surprise that the game consistently finds a way into lists of GameCube favourites.

> "The decision to create a remake was made by Shinji Mikami"
> Hiroyuki Kobayashi

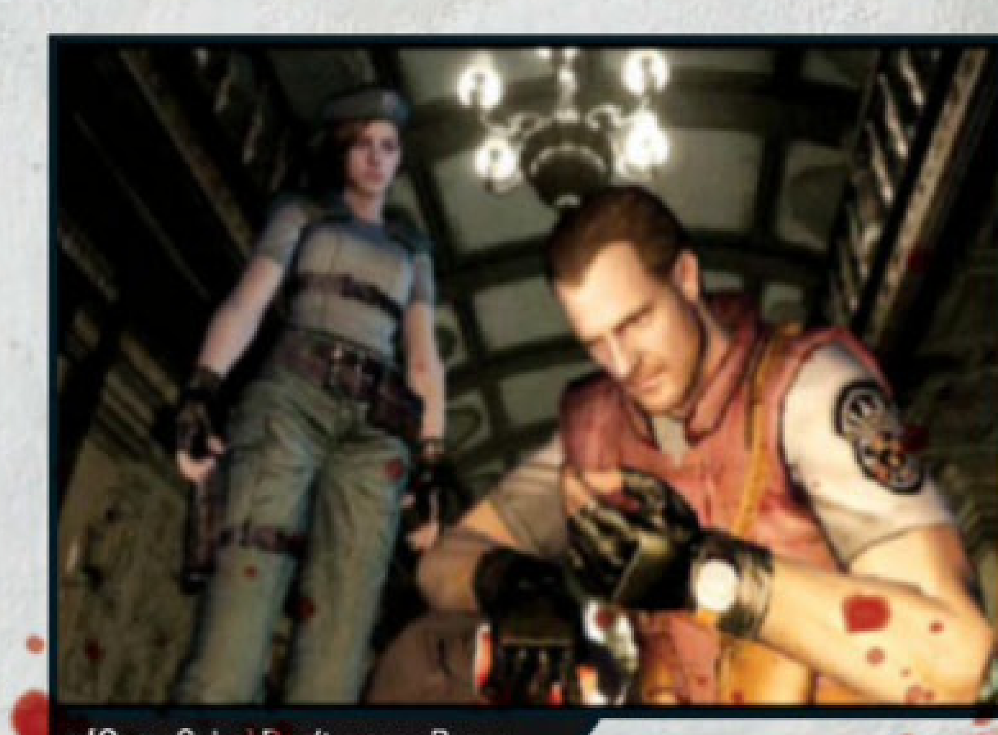
But why GameCube in the first place? "At the time the game was being developed, the GameCube was the most suitable hardware in terms of allowing us to realise our vision with the title," states Kobayashi, and it's not hard to run that statement under the Logicoscope – Nintendo's console was a little more powerful than the PS2, and it wasn't the western monstrosity that was the Xbox, making it the perfect home for this remake, even if it did have to span two discs in order to pitch camp. In fact, Nintendo's decision to do things so differently to its competitors arguably made this the perfect



» [GameCube] Turn the nozzle the wrong way and you'll wilt a perfectly good crop of herbs...



» [GameCube] At least you can see this guy! Shooting at off-screen enemies is a skill you need to master for older *Resident Evil* games.



» [GameCube] Don't worry, Barry... it probably isn't Chris' blood.





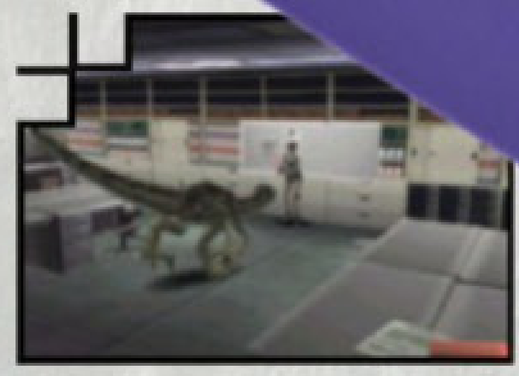
» [GameCube] While you can aim up and down, headshots only trigger randomly.

▶ place for *Resident Evil* to go for a fresh start. Owners likely wouldn't have been aware of the original, and those that were, would find in this remake a showcase that placed the console on at very least an even keel with its peers.

Even so, this was to be no ordinary remake and Capcom was keen to make the Spencer mansion welcoming (or unwelcoming depending on how you look at it) for all visitors. "We wanted to ensure that players who were familiar with the original 1996 version would have something to enjoy in the remake version as well," says Kobayashi. "We made sure to add and rearrange a lot of content." Whereas the *Director's Cut* version of the PlayStation original moved items around in order to keep players on their toes, the remake not only moved but also replaced elements and added to the puzzle formula. Even within the opening lobby, there are new areas, routes and puzzles, with changes only growing more obvious the deeper you venture into the mansion – newcomers would get a convoluted mansion to try and decrypt, while the veterans immediately knew that their previous experience of this horrible house won't be enough to get them by this time.

There were new combat items to learn too, in the form of emergency defence weapons. Daggers, stun guns and stun grenades could be stockpiled and employed to immediately escape the clutches of the undead. "As part of rebalancing the gameplay, we wanted to give players an additional way to get away from zombies and add a new combat element," explains Kobayashi and while these items were useful on a first or second run, they became essential on the higher difficulties, effectively a free pass that allowed you to take a hit and come out unscathed without needing to waste any ammo.

For all that it changed, though, the core of the game would remain intact. "As I worked on the 1996 PlayStation version, I was already intimately familiar with it," Kobayashi tells us. "But trying it out again at the time, I really thought it was still a great game, and I still think that now!" There's certainly a case to be made for the PlayStation original being the better game – its mansion is somewhat more coherent than that of the sprawling remake, its systems less complex and the voice acting is the stuff of legend, with lines so awful that they will live on forever in popular culture. Even though the remake only offers a slight improvement in this department, it at least sounds like the voice actors understand the words they're reading this time around. But without Barry asking what everything is, or references to Jill sandwiches and the 'master of unlocking', we'll always have a place in our hearts for the original game. As much of an improvement as this may be, you couldn't help but miss those iconic lines – it's a little surprising that Capcom didn't offer both the updated and original audio track, but a lot of the old dialogue simply wouldn't fit in the redesigned game. "The content of the game and the story details were changed so much that we had to re-record the dialogue," explains Kobayashi, although we're sure that isn't the only reason. To be fair, though, Capcom laughs along with the rest of us at the original dialogue; *Dead Rising* features a store called Jill's Sandwiches, while *Strider* has an Achievement simply called 'Master Of Unlocking'. Amazingly, Kobayashi reveals that the decision to recast and re-record the entire game wasn't even the hardest decision to make. "Balancing the enemies in the game was definitely the most difficult thing to do," he says. "We had the original as a reference point but wanted to improve on it and also include the new additions such as Crimson Heads without negatively affecting the overall balance of the game." The mere mention of Crimson Heads is enough to send shivers down our spines, as it likely will be for anyone who has fond memories of the remake. Whereas downed zombies were gone for good in the original game, the remake gave them the ability to return to life (well, undeath) even more deadly than before. Faster, stronger, more resilient and even able to open some doors, fighting Crimson Heads – especially on tougher difficulty modes – was often a shortcut to the famous 'YOU DIED' screen. Instead, preventing their arrival altogether proved the most effective way of dealing with this new threat, be it by removing the heads of zombies (which is basically a lucky critical hit), burning their bodies or simply not killing the basic brain-munchers in the first place. We can absolutely see how ▶



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

RESIDENT EVIL 2
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION
YEAR: 1998

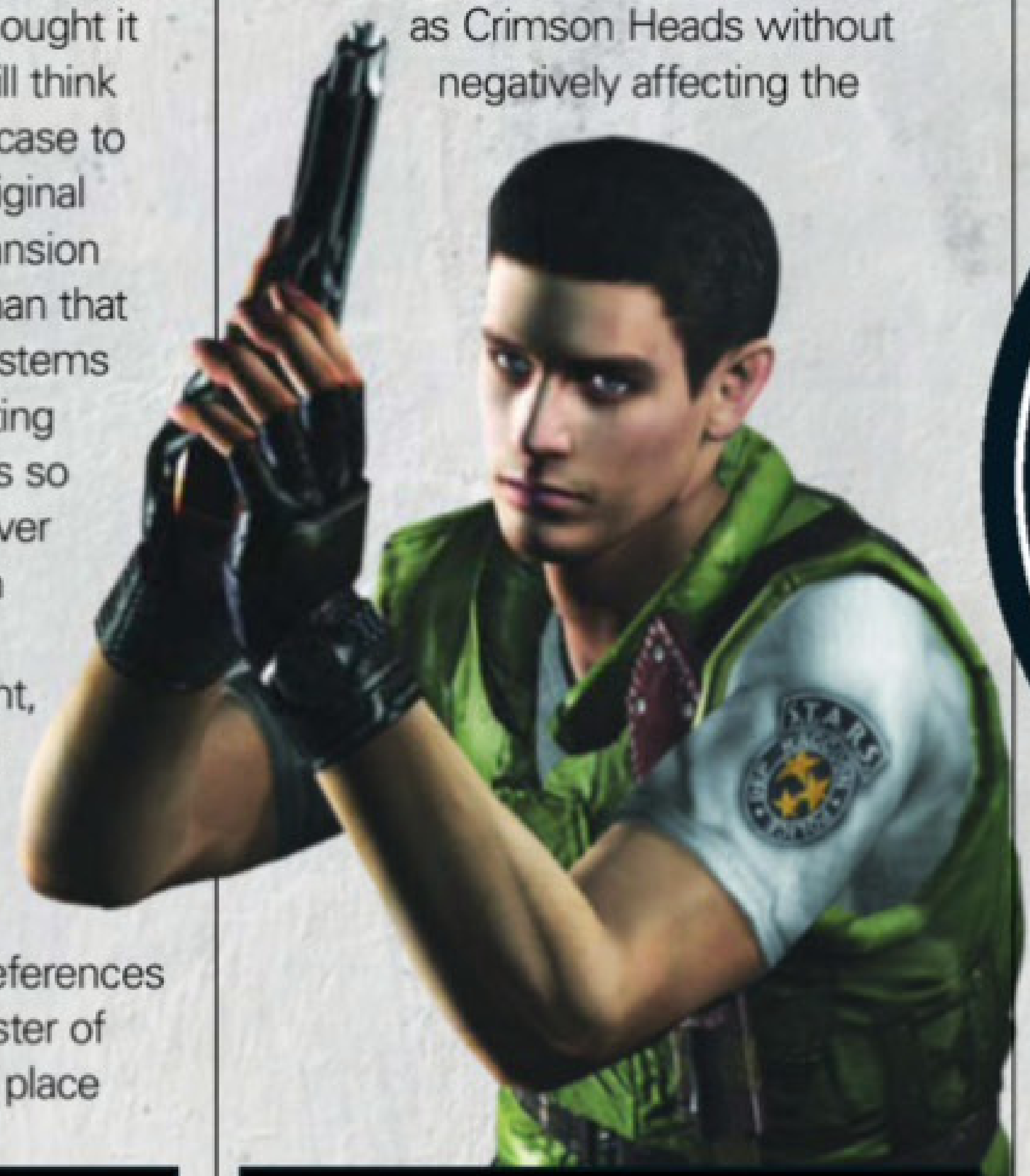
DINO CRISIS (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION
YEAR: 1999

DEVIL MAY CRY
SYSTEM: PS2
YEAR: 2001



» [GameCube] Hunters are just as savage as we remember, and their design is still superb.

> **"Content of the game was changed so much we had to re-record dialogue"**
> Hiroyuki Kobayashi





» [GameCube] Are the ravens even zombies? What does it matter – it still hurts when they peck you.



» [GameCube] The improved map actually shows which rooms still have stuff to collect in them.



» [GameCube] Unlockable outfits give you all the more reason to run through the game multiple times.



» [GameCube] Did anyone trust Wesker? Nobody who wears shades inside can be trusted. Fact.

CLASSIC MOMENTS

All the best bits from Capcom's chilling remake. How many do you remember?

MY FIRST ZOMBIE

■ The moment the very first zombie you encounter turns from its fleshy meal (which used to be your colleague, Kenneth) to give you a cold, dead stare will, for many, forever be a standout moment in survival horror. While you can stand and fight, running back to the dining room as Jill will see Barry polish him off. After that, you're on your own.





GET OFF ME!

■ Thorough players will no doubt have seen this when trying to reduce the chances of Crimson Head encounters. Regular zombies killed by gunfire don't always stay down, and if you try to burn the corpse before they're actually out for the count, they will suprise you and slap your lighter away in a move that is equally comical and terrifying.

WHO LET THE DOGS OUT?

■ One of gaming's greatest jump scares, having a pack of zombie dogs burst through the windows in the East wing proved a memorable moment in the PlayStation original. For the remake, Capcom took liberties to play on this – on your first pass, the windows only crack, and it isn't until you return that the dogs come smashing into the corridor.





ITCHY. TASTY.

■ Who could forget *that* journal entry, describing the groundskeeper's gradual turning? For a game that is generally considered to be poorly written, this one entry stands out as being both affecting and memorable. The game definitely peaks early in this regard, though – no other in-game documents even come close.

LEARN TO READ

■ A few of *Resident Evil*'s puzzles revolve around using the Examine option in the menu to check out puzzle items and reveal hidden clues. If you find something that seems useless and/or suspicious, a quick fiddle with the 3D model in the item viewer will often allow you to uncover the perplexing item's true purpose…



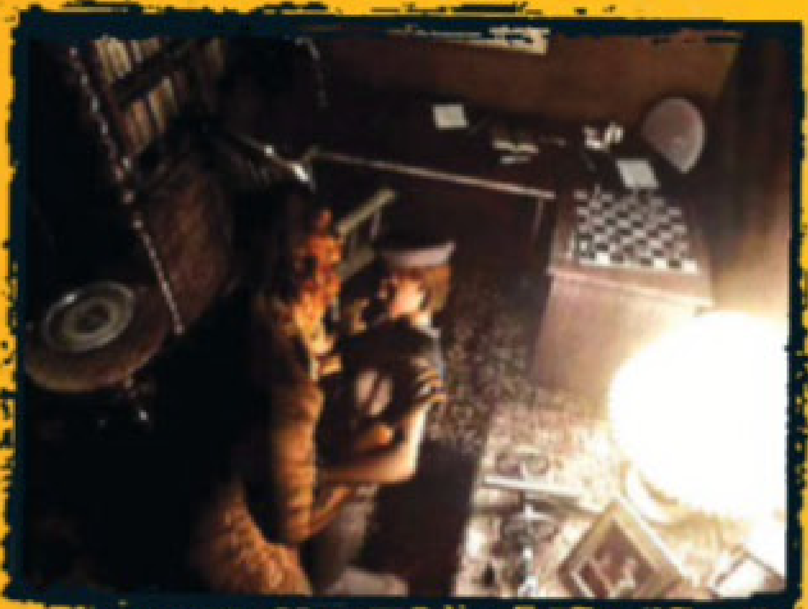


SNAKE EYES

■ It's all about the slow reveal with this one, from finding one of the giant snake's victims (your buddy, Richard) bleeding out nearby to a close encounter to the actual reveal and boss fight. As bio-weapons go, a giant snake probably isn't the most practical. Probably just as well you got rid of it…

RED IN THE FACE

■ Killing zombies used to be enough but for the remake, Capcom made the undead even more brutal. Slain undead would stay in place, potentially later returning again as brutal Crimson Head variants – faster, tougher and much more of a threat, the only way to stop these guys from appearing was to burn corpses or get lucky with headshots.





HUNTER/HUNTED

■ After showing a sequence through a shambling zombie's eyes earlier in the game, the speed and agility shown in this first-person cut scene make it even more terrifying – what the hell is after you this time? These things are no less horrible in person either, their huge claws disguising the fact that they're basically just bipedal frogs.

LISA TREVOR

■ With the GameCube release coming on two discs, Capcom needed a punchy way to end the first disk and lead into the second. Enter Lisa Trevor, a test subject formerly only alluded to in documents and flavour text, and a truly harrowing encounter on which to leave Disc One. We still have nightmares about encountering her in her cabin.



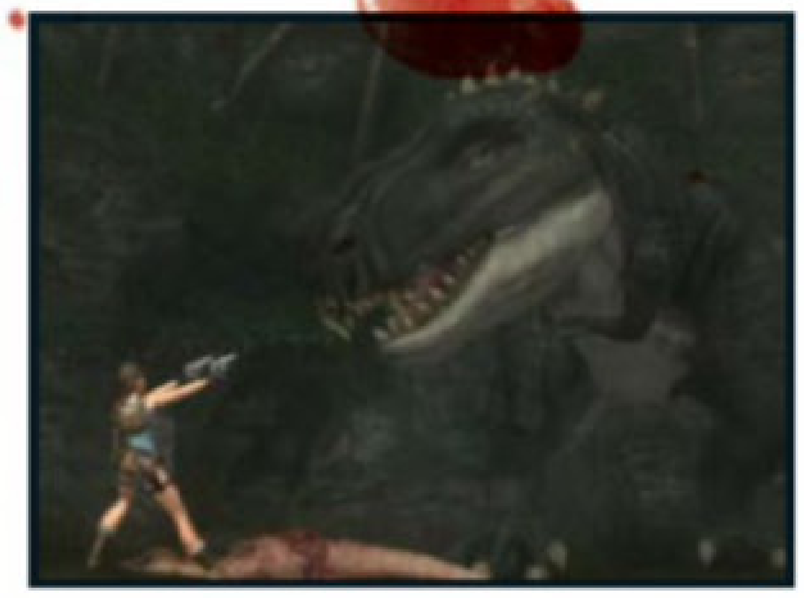


ENTER THE TYRANT

■ While the ultimate bio-weapon might resemble a badly-made mannequin, this dude takes one hell of a beating. Pump enough bullets into him, though, and you're treated to a *Resi* staple – a friend tossing a rocket launcher into the arena that can end the battle in a single shot. Don't mind if we do…



UNMISSABLE REMAKES



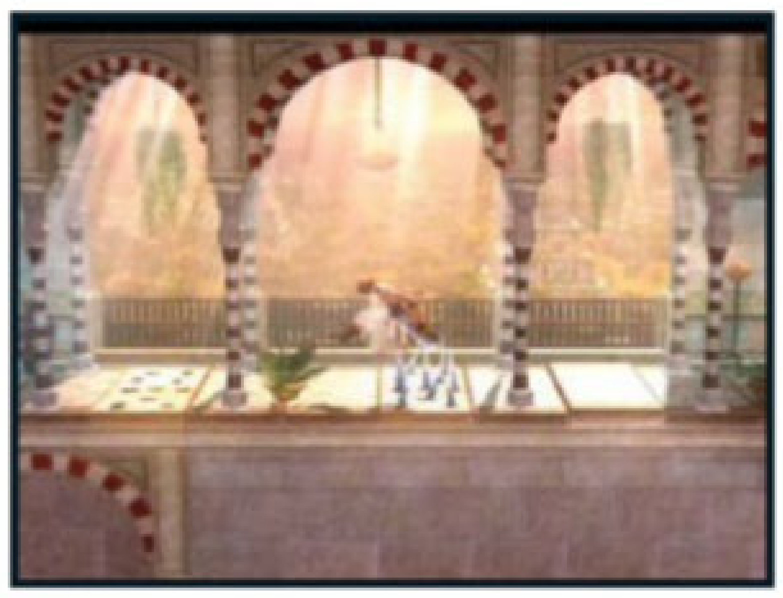
TOMB RAIDER: ANNIVERSARY

Anniversary was originally announced to tie in with the 10th anniversary of the 1996 original, this completely remade version of Lara's first outing didn't actually hit stores until 2007. Still, the new engine, graphics and mechanics combined with classic locations, enemies, puzzles, and story to excellent effect.



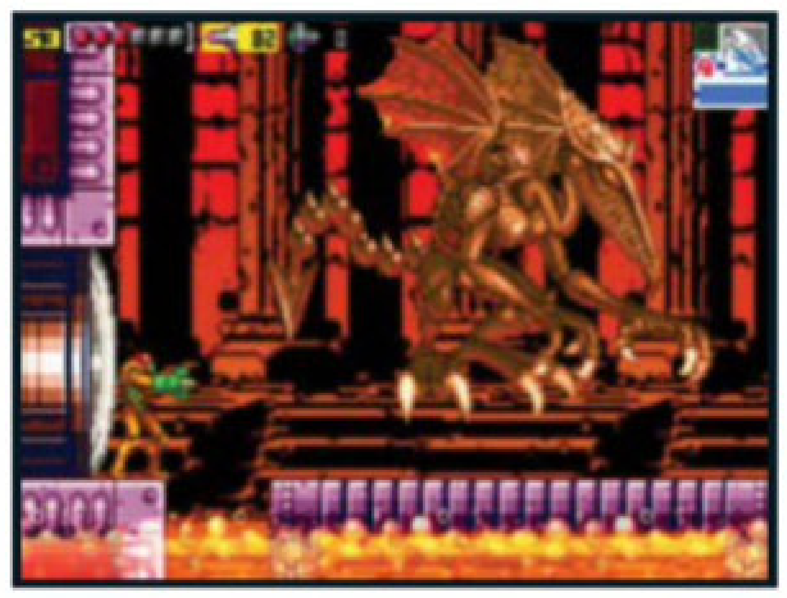
THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND: SPECIAL EDITION

Tim Schafer's crew found perhaps the ultimate way to do a remake – offer a new version of the game alongside the original, with the option to switch between the two. The developer commentaries were a nice touch too, offering insight into the game's creation.



PRINCE OF PERSIA CLASSIC

It is a testament to the original platformer's tight level design when all Ubisoft had to do for this digital remake was to give it a new lick of paint. Some of you may prefer the original art style, but that doesn't change the fact that this is a brilliant and faithful remake of a classic game.



METROID: ZERO MISSION

While we still love it, the simple style of the NES original wouldn't be all that impressive on GBA. Nintendo changed a fair amount in terms of both content and aesthetic for *Zero Mission*, pulling it more in line with *Super Metroid* and *Fusion*. It also added an entirely new boss: Mecha Ridley.

▶ balancing these guys must have been a nightmare – they are the game's one example of enemy placement that is effectively player controlled rather than predetermined, placing a lot of pressure on Capcom to educate the new players in the importance of preventing Crimson Head revivals where possible and also to facilitate this act. "The idea for Crimson Heads actually came from the director, Shinji Mikami," says Kobayashi. "I think they were a really successful new element that brought a new dimension to the zombies in the game."

It wasn't just new mechanics that had the team working around the clock either, with technical hurdles to overcome that arose from the fundamental style of the game. "Creating the motion video backgrounds was a real challenge, in terms of making it work on the console hardware," Kobayashi tells us. "We created them as 3D environments on what was then very high-end equipment, and then rendered still images and videos from those." It's only now, thanks to the new HD version, that we can really appreciate just how intricate these backdrops are – they obviously looked great on GameCube but in 1080p, you can pick out every little detail. It's incredible to think that this level of fidelity was achieved over a decade ago, with the classic trick of using pre-rendered backdrops allowing *Resident Evil* to look and feel years ahead of its time. *Code Veronica* saw the team dabble in full-3D *Resi*, but the team wanted to stay true to its roots for the remake. While it would have been possible to do the game entirely with polygons, the design wouldn't work without the static camera.



» [GameCube] Chris may not get the grenade launcher but he gets something equally entertaining, and useful with the threat of Crimson Heads lingering...



Like the fixed camera angles, there are other seemingly outdated design choices evident in *Resident Evil* that make it through to the remake intact, and it's all done with game design in mind rather than out of blind love for the original. Tank controls weren't to everyone's taste, although the sluggish movement and inability to move while aiming still lend the game a sense of panic when an enemy is near. Similarly, using Ink Ribbons to fuel limited game saves made quite a lot of people angry back in the day, but PC quicksave addicts and the autosave generation would both do well to realise that most typewriters are found in safe rooms, meaning you can just store your precious ink and use when needed. The inventory system took some getting used to as well, especially if you chose Chris. With only six slots to Jill's eight, efficiency was key – you only had room for a weapon, a little ammo, a healing item, a key and maybe a puzzle item, with one space left for some stuff that you found along the way.

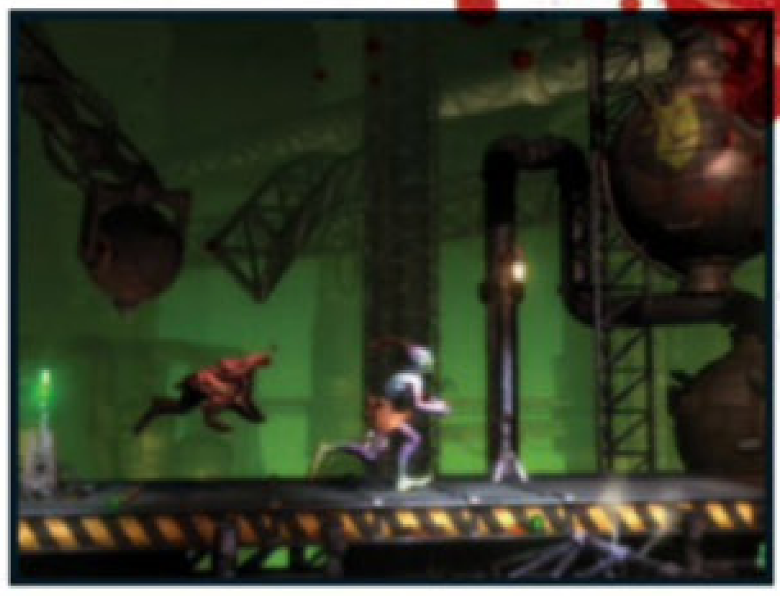
"I don't remember exactly," muses Kobayashi when asked how long the project took to complete. "But I think the team was about a hundred people and the project ran for around 18 months." It's amazing to think that a remake of a PlayStation game should be about as resource-intensive as many other projects at the time but then again, there isn't a single element of the original that hasn't been changed; maps and puzzles had to be redone, set pieces rethought, characters and backdrops created from scratch for new hardware. In fact, it's amazing that Capcom managed to pull all off in just a year and a half – many modern games don't even get out of the planning stage in that kind of time. Kobayashi explains that it wasn't all hard graft, either. "Designing the layout for the mansion was a lot of fun," he smiles. "We would try to put ourselves in the shoes of the player walking through the rooms, and imagine which areas would be the best place to hide something scary."

Drawing on four games' worth of jump scares, devious camera placement and just-in-the-nick-of-time item boxes and save points, Capcom assembled pieces from all over its franchise and bolted them all onto the original game to make it something much bigger, much better and much more… well, evil. The first game didn't stray too far from the template laid out by *Alone In The Dark*



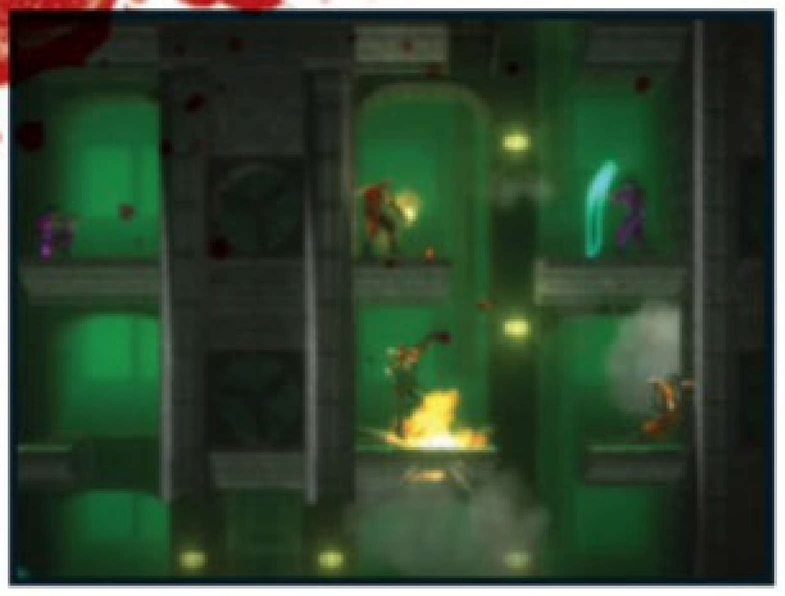
THE KING OF FIGHTERS 2002 UNLIMITED MATCH

With an expanded roster, new backdrops and a host of new moves and gameplay tweaks, this belated update to an SNK favourite proved to be an all-encompassing celebration of the series and as good a greatest hits collection as there is on the beat-'em-up scene.



ODDWORLD: NEW 'N' TASTY!

Do you remember how good the PlayStation original looked? *New 'N' Tasty* actually looks as good as you remember it. Again, it's faithful to the first *Oddworld* game, the only real difference being that Mudokons come in greater numbers, meaning there are lots more in total to save.



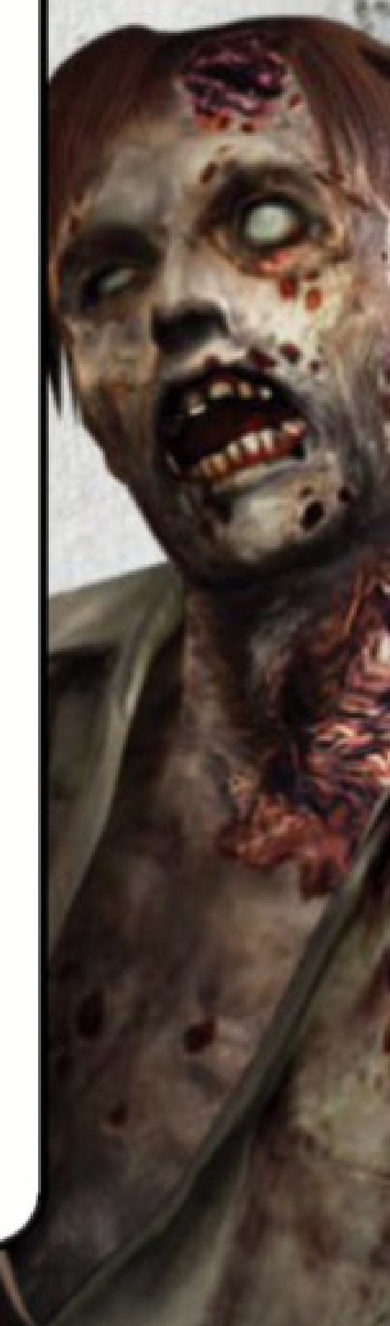
BIONIC COMMANDO REARMED

Around the same time as Capcom released its full-3D reboot of the *Bionic Commando* series, it also saw fit to stay true to the series' roots with this digital update. Mechanically strong, the game even got a sequel, so it must have done alright.



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: LINK'S AWAKENING DX

Still one of the best *Zelda* games to this day, Nintendo did an awesome job with updating the game for the newly-released Game Boy Color. Not only is the full game a tehnicolour delight but colour even extends into gameplay, particularly in the additional dungeon.



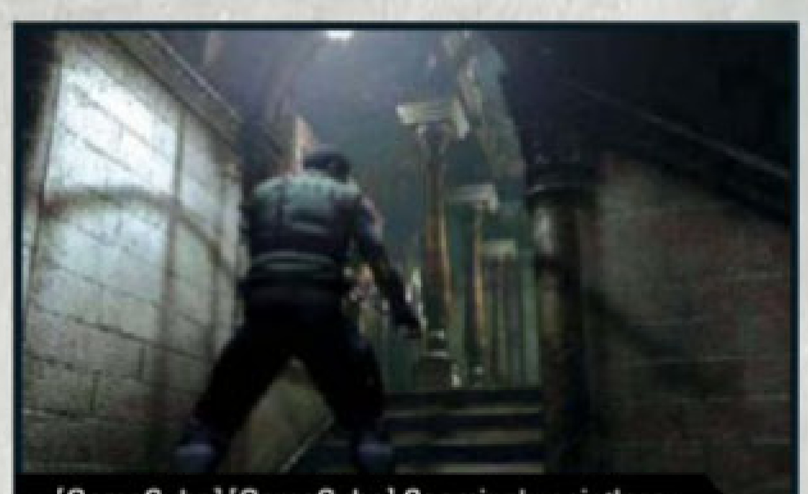
a few years before, but the GameCube version's thorough makeover couldn't have put more distance between the two series – amusingly, it actually came out the year after the disappointing *A New Nightmare*. Capcom's remastered classic put the last nail in Infogrames series' coffin before it commited suicide with its own reboot in 2008 – a game so bad that you could simply to choose to skip entire levels if you liked, such was the lack of faith in its quality and whether or not sections would actually work properly. With *Silent Hill 2* and *Fatal Frame* on the scene, *Resi* had to be on top form, and the team made damn sure that it was. Just to be absolutely sure, though, there was *Resident Evil 4* in the pipeline… but that's another story for another time.

So what is the primary reason for the remake's lasting renown and popularity? "I would say it's because it isn't just a graphical upgrade, but an expansion of the gameplay that made the original title so popular," states Kobayashi, and it's a somewhat validating response – the team managed to breathe new life into a classic on more than just a technical level, to the point where 1080p spruce-up still makes it as relevant and

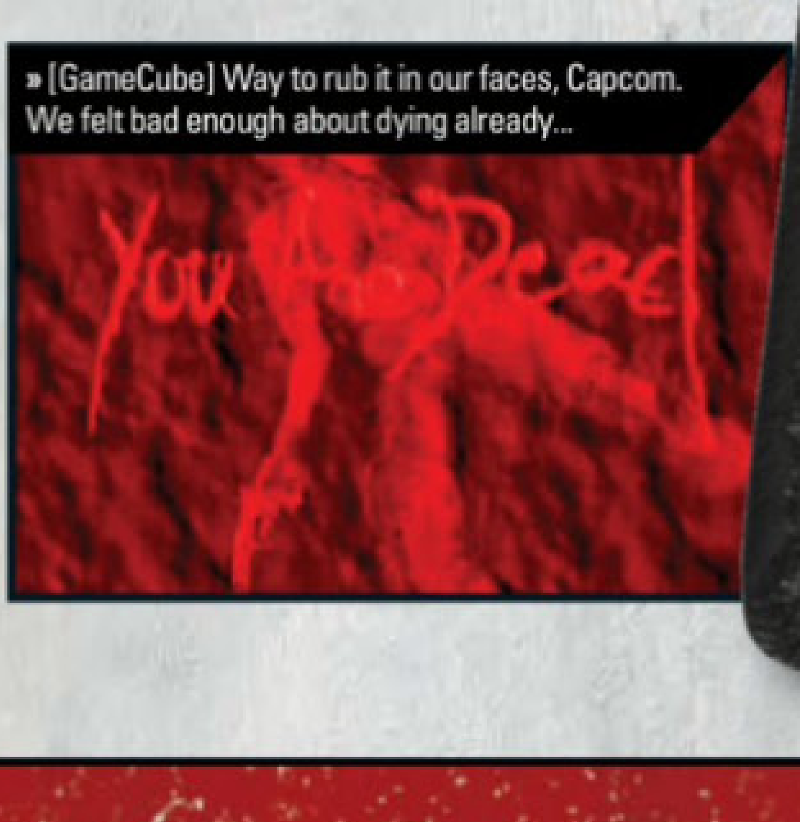
> "The team was about a 100 people and [the project] ran for 18 months"
> Hiroyuki Kobayashi

enjoyable in now as it was 13 years prior. If anything, it's even more important today. Since *RE 4*, the series has clearly decided that it wants to be an action game, and it's no surprise that the copycats followed suit. But with the series falling out of favour following *RE 6* and the awful *Operation Raccoon City*, it's time for a change.

If the remake receives a warm reception, it's likely that said change will involve Capcom going back to the format that made both the PlayStation original and its GameCube update so special. Welcome back to the world of survival horror, people. *



» [GameCube] [GameCube] Seemingly pointless areas from the original actually have a purpose now.



» [GameCube] Way to rub it in our faces, Capcom. We felt bad enough about dying already...



REREMAKE

Why you should check out Resident Evil HD

Capcom has just seen fit to rerelease this remake on modern consoles, presumably as a way to gauge popularity of traditional survival horror principles and gameplay in order to try and find its footing for *Resident Evil 7*. While it would never pass for a native PS4 or Xbox One game, the remaster is a great effort all the same – pre-rendered backdrops have been modified to allow for widescreen displays, scrolling locations and greatly improved lighting, while character and enemy models are also improved to bring them in line with the new environments. There's a new control scheme added for those who couldn't get on with tank controls but truth be told, it does tend to make the game a little easier, and it's not so hard to avoid enemies. After disappointing HD updates like *Resident Evil 4*, it's great to see Capcom get it right for its original zombie adventure.

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In the chair with...

MARK HEALEY

A quarter of a century in the games business has seen Mark Healey go from pixelating Garfield to stuffing Sackboy full of love. Paul Drury hangs out in his pod

Ever since Santa brought him a Commodore 64 in the early Eighties, Mark Healey has had a passion for making games and giving users the tools to make their own, too. After freelancing for such outfits as The Edge and Codemasters, he leapt at the chance to join Bullfrog and became a key member of Peter Molyneux's crew during an especially creative time for the company, working on such titles as *Theme Park*, *Magic Carpet* and *Dungeon Keeper*. When Bullfrog croaked, he co-founded Media Molecule and enjoyed huge success with the *LittleBigPlanet* series. Since selling the company to Sony in 2010, Mark has continued to work for the studio and is orchestrating an ambitious PS4 project, whilst tinkering with his C64 at home.



» Mark and his first coding mentor – the mighty Gortek and his trusty microchips…

Mark, we've seen your appearance in the *From Bedroom To Billions* documentary and you give a very worrying account of how the stress of making videogames can affect your bowels.

It was just before I started at Bullfrog. I was doing a day job and then freelancing at night, working in a dive of an office and sleeping on their floor. It was terrible. I was incredibly stressed and ended up doing this white poo. I looked in the bowl and said, 'This is f**ked up man, I've got to change something here.'

Well… thanks for clearing that up for us. We hope that making games hasn't always been so detrimental to your health.

Nah, ever since I got a Commodore 64 for Christmas in 1984, what excited me was making my own things with it. The manual was in my school bag all the time and the back of my maths book was full of little user defined graphics and data statements ready to type in when I got home.

Did you manage to produce any games while you were still studying at school?

I did write a text adventure in BASIC called *Agoraphobia*, which I made myself, I photocopied the cassette inlay and sold three copies in the playground. It was really crude and had about three locations. In the game, you were so agoraphobic, so you would brick up windows and doors…

Erm, was this a case of art imitating life?

Yeah, I spent an unhealthy amount of time in my bedroom, enough for my mum to worry, though, I did roam the streets, getting up to no good as well. Anyway, in the game, there was this naked woman on the bed who you had to do odd things to. You had to retrieve a snorkel from her and then flush yourself down the toilet…

Let's move swiftly on to your education, shall we? Did you study programming at all?

I actually went to art college to study graphic art and design. I told them at the interview that I wanted to make computer games and they laughed at me but they still let me join the course. Coming from a single parent family, I didn't have a lot of money so I got a grant to buy equipment. When I got to the start of the 2nd year, I spunked my whole grant on a disk drive for my C64. I had to leave the course because I couldn't afford to buy paper and pens after that.

Whoops. Was it a trip to the dole office for you?

Nah, you couldn't just sign on, you had to go on a YTS, a Youth Training Scheme, or 'You're Thatcher's Slave' as we called it. I said I wanted to make computer games so they put me on a business programming course. I was streets ahead of the teacher so I got really bored and got into trouble quite a lot. I ended up getting kicked off the course but one of the teachers knew someone on another course whose boyfriend was writing real Spectrum games and he hooked us up. That was my foot in the door of the industry.

Who was this mystery boyfriend?

Christian Pennycate. He was doing freelance stuff for Codemasters and he'd seen my demos so sent me up to see David Darling [who was head of Codemasters], which was really exciting. He was like a rock star to me. I got there and thought, shit I better pitch something! I came up with '*Celestial Garbage Collector*', which was like *Dropzone* but collecting rubbish. David looked at me, clearly seeing I was new to pitching game ideas and said, why don't you do a C64 version of your friend's Spectrum game *KGB Superspy*?

Sound advice, and *KGB Superspy* became your first published game in 1989.

Yeah, I got £1700 for that which wasn't bad, though it took me four or five months, living at home. I didn't get paid until after it was all done, and I remember my mum nagging me for money towards my keep. She actually rang up Codemasters and gave them this massive nag. 'I was like, Mum, you'll ruin everything!' But we got a cheque the next day, an advance.

'Absolutely brilliant', as the Darlings would say. We see you also did some work for Tim Langdell, the head of publishing house The Edge. He's got quite a reputation, these days…

At the time, I got the impression he was a bit of a floaty character, in the clouds. He had this American wife who was like his mouth – the mouth of Sauron.



> "There were times we wanted to kill each other with screwdrivers. I'm not kidding" Mark Healey



» The Bullfrog boys in the mid-90s during an Amsterdam 'bonding' trip.

SELECTED TIMELINE

GAMES

- **KGB Superspy** [C64] 1989
- **Darius+** [ZX SPECTRUM] 1990
- **Biff** [ZX SPECTRUM] 1992
- **Hook** [C64] 1992
- **Sleepwalker** [C64] 1993
- **Fun School: Paint and Create** [DOS] 1993
- **Theme Park** [DOS] 1994
- **Magic Carpet** [DOS] 1994
- **Dungeon Keeper** [DOS] 1997
- **Black and White** [DOS] 2001
- **Fable** [PC] 2004
- **Rag Doll Kung Fu** [PC] 2005
- **LittleBigPlanet** [PS3] 2008
- **LittleBigPlanet 2** [PS3] 2011

Getting any money out of them was like getting blood from a stone. A producer guy once tried to get me a bit of money for all the work I'd done. [Tim] got really angry and punched a hole in the wall. I think they were struggling on the edge of bankruptcy. I remember doing the graphics for *The Punisher* for the Amiga and ST and I had to send the disk with them on by Red Star at the train station in London. I remember them telling me the account hadn't been paid for a year. I know now Tim's made a career out of suing people for using the word 'Edge', which just makes me feel really sad.

You seem to have been happy and willing to take on pretty much any kind of freelance work at this stage in your career.
Yeah, I was trying to cling on in the industry any way I could. I did loading screens for *Garfield* on the Speccy and Amstrad, graphics for the arcade conversion of *Darius* and ended up forming a company with Christian [Pennycate]. Well, more of a collective really, with a bunch of others. We did loads of stuff for Europress, educational things like *Fun School* and *Paint And Create*, which, with hindsight, I kind of see as a very early flavour of *LittleBigPlanet*.

We see you did the graphics for *Biff*, too.
That was an evening's work! A friend of Christian's called Stephen Nunn was the Spectrum coder and he would never quite got it together to finish a game, so he asked me to help with some of the graphics work. It was a weird little monkey…

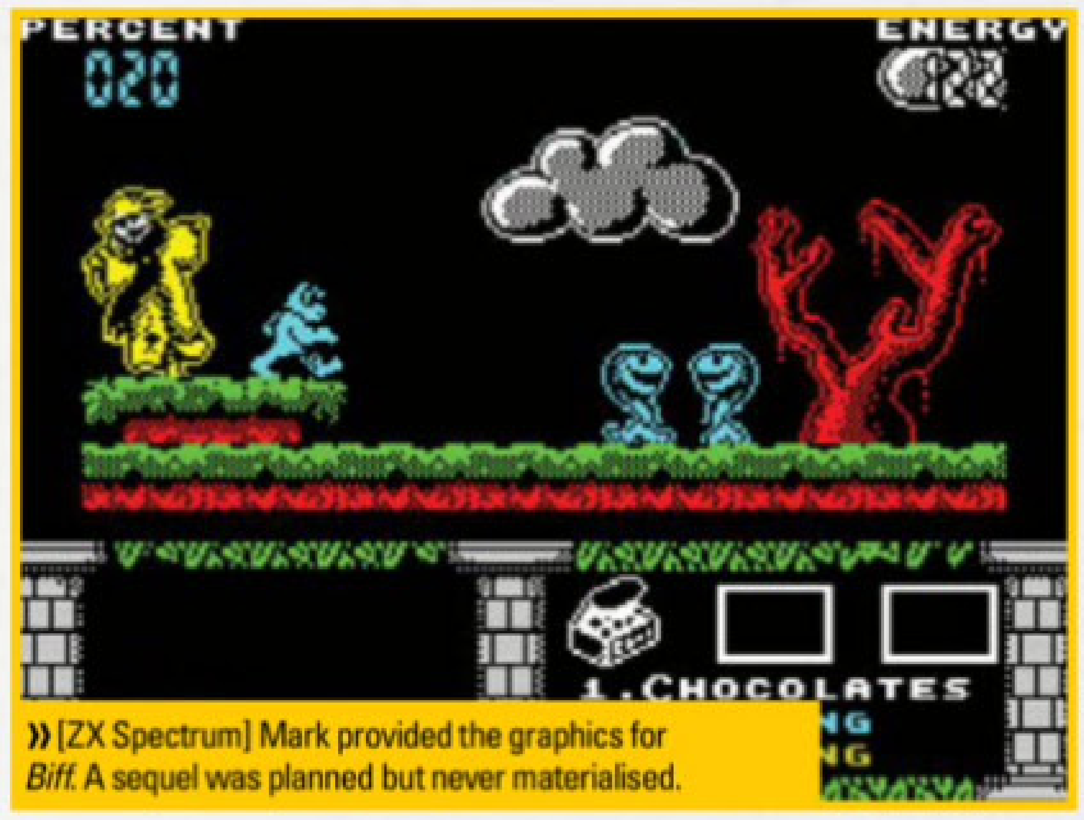
The main character always reminded us of the youths you'd see walking around Northern towns, looking for a fight. We thought that's why he was called Biff. You really managed to nail that perfect Neanderthal look…
[laughs] I didn't take it that seriously. It was just like, 'Bosh, there you go…' I was getting pretty quick at boshing out graphics. I mean, *Hook* for Ocean only took me a few days.

You seem to have stuck with the 8-bit machines right into the Nineties. Was it that you didn't want to 'let go'?
Yeah, the C64 was the computer I grew up with and it did have quite a long lifespan, didn't it? There was a bit of scariness involved when things started moving over to the 16 bits but while I was still doing 64 stuff, I was doing bits for the PC, ST and Amiga. It kind of blended over nicely, a natural progression.

In 1994 you joined Bullfrog. Was it a relief to join a big name company like that?
God, yeah. The company I'd started with friends had gone bust and I had this weird period working a day job at Bits in Cricklewood and doing freelance work at night for Arcane on an Amiga game called *Turbo Trax*. That's when I did that white poo…

> "I said to Peter Molyneux, 'Are we going to get Dungeon Keeper moving or what, for f**ks sake…' He looked at me, like, 'Why is this runt talking to me?'"
> MARK HEALEY

Let's not go back there. Can you recall your first day at Bullfrog?
I walked in and said, 'Hi, I'm the new guy and I've just trashed someone's car.' I'd smashed into Mike Diskett's car [lead on *Syndicate Wars*]. Bullfrog were just finishing off *Theme Park*, though all I did for that was draw a font for it, but I did get myself noticed after a while. I was given the task of doing the graphics for the SNES and Mega Ddrive versions of *Theme Park*. I did them in three days and everyone was like, 'f**k me, amazing!' I was just so hungry to prove myself.



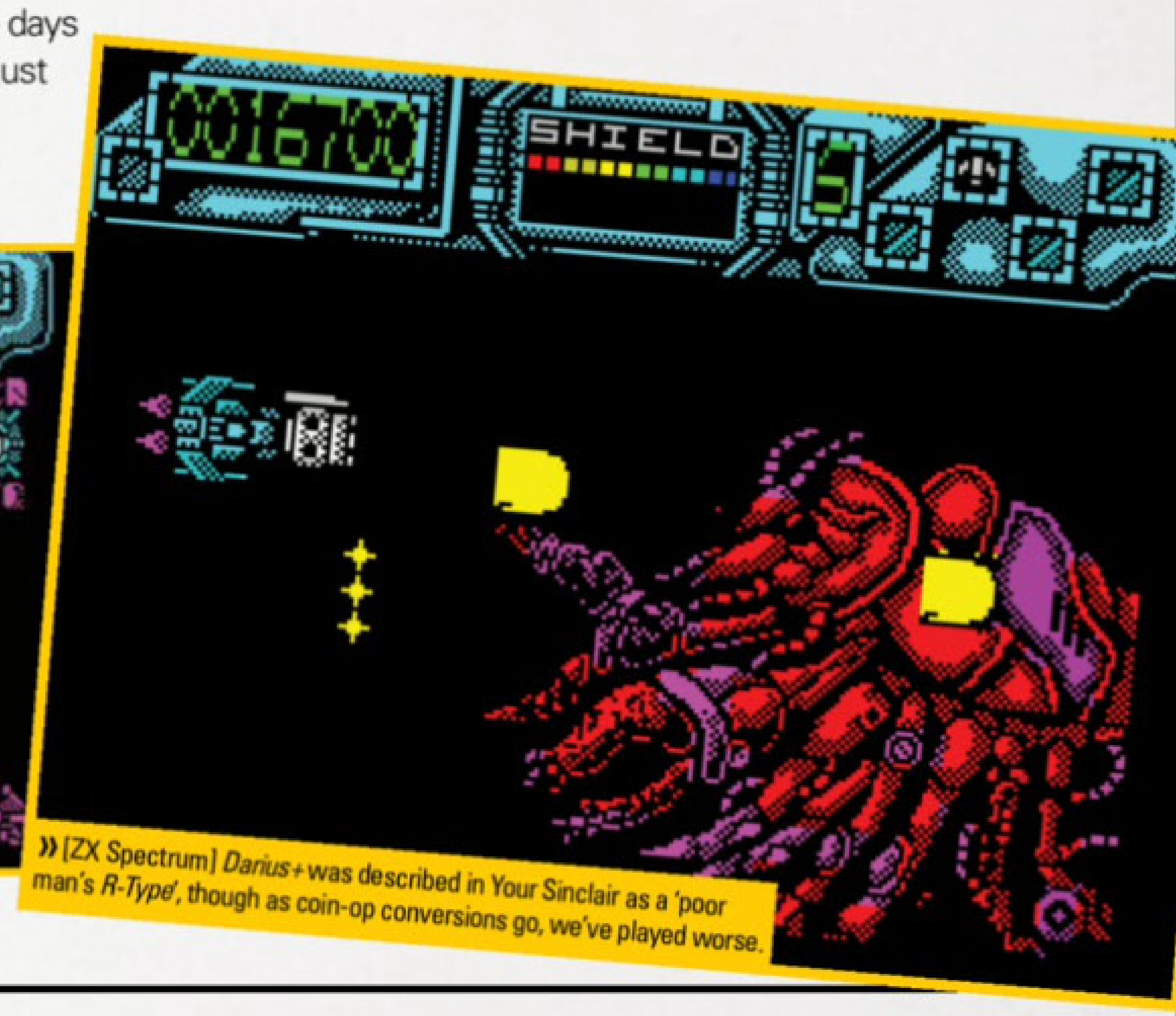
» [ZX Spectrum] Mark provided the graphics for *Biff*. A sequel was planned but never materialised.

You then worked on *Magic Carpet*, another ambitious and original game.
The main artist was a guy called Finn, a Scottish guy, and it was more like, 'You need a palm tree? A giant crab? I'll do that!' We basically just made it up as we went along and I boshed stuff out but my big break was *Dungeon Keeper*.

Ah yes, you seem to have had more involvement with the game design on that project as well as the graphics.
I constantly threw in ideas and I tried to inject my brash humour, like the hand you can use to slap the imps and the exploding grenades, which were like creatures. There were only about four or five of us working on that game, in a room in Peter's house.

You mean Peter Molyneux, the enigmatic head of Bullfrog. What was he like to work for?
I remember talking to Peter near the start of *Dungeon Keeper* and I was a bit of a cocky character. He was in the office one day and I went up to him and said, 'Are we going to get this thing moving or what, man, for f**k's sake…' He looked at





» [ZX Spectrum] *Darius+* was described in Your Sinclair as a 'poor man's *R-Type*', though as coin-op conversions go, we've played worse.

FIVE TO PLAY

Essential games by Mark that you need to play immediately



KGB SUPERSPY 1989

■ Mark's debut was this competent scrolling shooter, which places the emphasis less on spying and more on killing… Well, everhything. In keeping with the Eighties obsession with helicopters, you pilot a chopper and deal out a helping of death to jeep drivers, tank commanders and that other Eighties stalwart, men with jetpacks.



DUNGEON KEEPER 1997

■ Mark calls it his 'first big break' at Bullfrog, *Dungeon Keeper* is the kind of game that became the company's trademark. Combining strategy elements with *Populous* 'hand of God' controls and a dash of Tower Defence-style combat, it also works as a metaphor for life at Bullfrog. We wonder who the Horned Reaper represented?



BLACK AND WHITE 2001

■ Joining Peter Molyneux in his Lionhead adventure, Mark was involved with this typically ambitious project from the start. Adding an intriguing nurturing element to the God game genre, budding deities can raise a gigantic creature to help them protect or destroy island life through judicious slapping and stroking.



LITTLEBIGPLANET 2008

■ Part polished platformer, part game creation tool, *LittleBigPlanet* has been a revelation on the PS3, inspiring users to create literally millions of new levels. The loveable Sackboy became an unlikely mascot for Sony, starring in some excellent sequels and handheld instalments and even 'doing a Mario' by hopping into a kart.



TEARAWAY 2013

■ A wonderful journey through an enchanting paper world, this was Media Molecule at its imaginative best. "I really just played it and gave feedback," explains Mark. "The only time I really stuck my oar in was convincing them to keep the finger mechanic of it poking through into the screen. That almost fell by the wayside."



» [C64] *Sleepwalker*, along with *Hook*, featured Mark's visuals and proved the aging 8-bit could still?

me, shocked, like, 'Why is this runt talking to me?' But I think he quite liked it. A lot of people there were quite arse licking and I was this cheeky git from a council estate. We ended up being really good friends. We still keep in touch.

So why were you working at Peter Molyneux's house and not in the Bullfrog studios?

It was a really weird time. Essentially Pete got banned from the office, which was ridiculous. I think he'd handed in his notice, so a bunch of us moved out to his house and worked there all day long. I remember thinking at the time that *Dungeon Keeper* was a parody of Bullfrog. Peter was like the Dungeon Master, going round and slapping people occasionally and there was a big thing in the game about the wizards. They were like the star programmers at Bullfrog and when they got too powerful, they'd start rebelling.

Yes, things weren't exactly all rosy at the company by this point.

Peter had left Bullfrog and it had been sold to Electronic Arts. I don't know what they're like now but back then, if they bought you it was the end of your company. They assimilated you into the Borg. What Bullfrog was essentially destroyed and all they were really doing was buying the name. Peter wanted to start again from scratch and I was happy to go with him. So I became the first artist at Lionhead.

That was 1997 and work began on what would become *Black And White*, though it didn't get released until 2001. That's quite the long haul, Mark.

Yeah, it was a tough one. It was a very organic process, all being made up as we went along. Lots of stuff was thrown away. Peter was funding it himself and he was getting stressed but he wanted it to be great. I do remember it being a good laugh and lots of funny arguments, with stuff getting kicked across the room.



» Mark in the early Nineties, graphic by day, grunge by night…

It sounds like an Alex Ferguson team talk. We always wondered if working with Peter Molyneux meant you feared him doing interviews with the gaming press because he'd end up promising the earth and you'd think: how the hell are we going to deliver that?!

That was part of Peter's design process. He'd design features by talking to the press. That's no joke. He'd get steered into a particular conversation and the journalist would say, 'Will you be able to do this or that,' and internally Pete would be thinking, 'That's a f**king great idea!' and start talking like that was the plan all along. Yeah, there was a sense of dread among the programmers whenever Peter went to see the press because they knew whatever they were working on would completely change… redesigned in the process of an interview! But, you know, I kind of enjoyed it.

You did some work on *Fable*, another game that was really talked up by Peter.

I ended up helping out towards the end. When Pete formed Lionhead, he had these megalomaniac ideas of taking over the world and started up all these other companies called 'Lionhead satellites'. One was Big Blue Box, which was basically the Carter brothers and they would work on a game and Peter would occasionally provide some 'steerage'. That went on for ages and it came to a crunch point and we had to choose one of these satellite studios to bring in house and actually get a game finished. That became *Fable* and I did lots of the cutscenes and stuff. By this time, I'd moved more into R&D, working with a guy called Alex Evans, who eventually ended up being my partner at Media Molecule.

At what point did you decide to leave Lionhead and set up your own company?

Lionhead were up shit creek and Peter was trying to sell the company. Because I was a founding member I had some shares and Alex was trying to persuade me to start something with him. I wasn't sure – I had this nice cushy job at Lionhead. I went on holiday to think about it and when I got back, Alex said, 'I've

In the chair with...



YOU ASK THE QUESTIONS

We convinced Mark to stop his virtual puppeteering for long enough to answer your questions

MERMAN: Do you still have the machines you used to code for?

Even now when I'm working on the PS4, I'll go home at night and think, how would I do this on a C64? I get obsessed with overlaying hi-res sprites over multi-coloured sprites, that sort of stuff. Quite sad. It's my safe place I go to when things get scary. I have slowly been making a new C64 game though I haven't touched it for a year. It's called *Mega Annihilation Death*. Essentially, it's the game I always planned to make back in the day…I want to lay the ghost to rest! It's a cross between *Delta* and *Mega Apocalypse* and you can see a video of progress on YouTube.

MERMAN: Could anyone ever recreate the special Bullfrog environment that gave rise to so many unique games?

Yes, I think so. Peter [Molyneux] has his own eccentric ways and he is probably trying to recreate that at 22cans. You can see the spirit of Bullfrog in iOS startups, apart from the annoying accountants who seem to be getting involved in game design and free-to play-mechanics.

MERMAN: What is your biggest regret, the one thing you wished had never ended up on the cutting room floor?

A demo I did with Alex [Evans] called *The Room*. It had portals and virtual clay you could make things with and they'd come to life. In some ways it was a precursor to *LittleBigPlanet* and was way ahead of its time in terms of ideas and technology. It could have been phenomenal I think. Peter had got into this competition with Will Wright to come up with a game based on the poetry of Emily Dickinson. He came to us in a bit of a panic because he hadn't got anything and asked if he could he use our thing. We moulded it and added some words of Emily Dickinson over the top. It was a bit annoying… we had this amazing technology and it got spunked off on this bet!



» An early sketch (above) of one of the monsters for *Dungeon Keeper (below)*.



handed your notice in for you'. I was like, 'Ok, f**king great…' Then I thought, 'F**k it, I've got a few grand from the game, *Rag Doll Kung Fu* so at least I can eat for a couple months…'

Ah yes, *Rag Doll Kung Fu*, released in 2005. Was that you trying to get back into coding again?
I'd taught myself C and was getting back into programming plus I'd made a silly kung fu film with my friends at the weekend so I thought, I'll use this for cutscenes and make a little kung fu game. I latched on to this idea of rag doll characters and worked on it in my spare time, as a pet project. I ended up showing it at GDC at the experimental games workshop in front of 500 people. I was shitting myself but it got a lot of laughs and went down really well. In the audience were some people from Valve and they were just launching Steam and they said my game would be perfect for it. They flew me over to Seattle to meet Gabe Newell and my little claim to fame is *Rag Doll Kung Fu* was the first third party game to appear on Steam.

That must have given you some confidence when you were pitching the idea for *LittleBigPlanet*.
Alex had arranged this meeting with Phil Harrison at Sony but we were more pitching ourselves, I suppose. We knew from *Rag Doll* that players liked customising their characters so we knew that would be something big but other than that, we didn't really know what the f**k we were talking about. Basically we said if you give us some money we'll come up with something great in six months. They gave us £250,000 and Phil in particular encouraged us to pursue that creative idea.

User-generated content was a big part of *LittleBigPlanet*. Is turning game players into game makers something important to you?
Well, yeah. Even before I got my C64 I was more into the idea of making than playing games. Once I realised BASIC wasn't going to be good enough but

machine code was still a bit too scary, I was looking at the game design packages for the 64, like *Shoot 'Em Up Construction Kit* which was limited and *White Lightening*, which was crap. I always had this hunger for the ultimate game making package that took away all the headachey stuff.

Was it hard to keep true to your original vision for the game?
Starting a company with friends is hard. There were two camps – one wanted it to be a physics platformer and I wanted a full-on games making package. There was quite a bit of tension and a lot of arguments but we ended up meeting in the middle, which turned out pretty well. Friendships were tested, though. There were times we wanted to kill each other with screwdrivers. I'm not kidding.

It was quite a coup getting Stephen Fry to do the voiceover for *LittleBigPlanet*.
That was brilliant. I'd said in an off-the-cuff remark it'd be amazing to get him. I'd just seen *Hitchhikers Guide To The Galaxy* and Stephen Fry was the computer in it. It was just a fantasy spoken out loud and then two weeks later someone from Sony was like, yeah, we've got him. F**king hell! That's the brilliance of working with a big publisher – they can make things like that happen.

> "I'd said in an off-the-cuff remark it'd be amazing to get Stephen Fry to do the voice for LittleBigPlanet. Two weeks later Sony were like, yeah, we've got him…"
> MARK HEALEY



» [PC] *Magic Carpet* was full of Eastern promise. And mist to help the framerate.

LittleBigPlanet 2 has lots of nods to 8-bit games. We particularly loved the Jeff Minter-style camel. Was that your doing?
I made that camel! [laughs] Back when I made those games for my mates at school, it just felt so empowering, to make something and share it with your friends. There's something magical about it. *LittleBigPlanet* was about trying to encapsulate that magic of making stuff. It's like it's become my spiritual mission – empower our kids!



» Mark in contemplative mood during the coding of *Dungeon Keeper* at Peter Molyneux's house.

You sold Media Molecule to Sony and other studios handled the PSP, Vita and the third instalments of *LittleBigPlanet*. Was it difficult to leave your beloved Sackboy in the care of someone else?
You're right, it is a hard thing to let go of but I have a feeling that we will come back to it in the future. It would be a shame to abandon Sackboy. It'd be like Nintendo abandoning Mario.

Yes, Sackboy did rather become quite the unlikely mascot for Sony after *LittleBigPlanet*'s release and subsequent popularity.
It was a bit of a rollercoaster dream, really. We somehow did the right thing at the right time and Sony said we really like Sackboy and we want to adopt him as a mascot. We were like f**king hell! Mad! But because we'd got that history of doing good shit without anyone interfering, they gave us a lot of rope, you know? Though I think we're probably pushing the limits with our current project.

It's a long shot, we know but can you tell us anything about what you are working on now?
Probably not. But I will anyway. It's been five years now, which is scary, but it is f**king ambitious. We did a teaser for the PS4 launch and you'll see us controlling these puppets using Move controllers. It's



» [PC] Mark's first task on joining Bullfrog was to add some touches to *Theme Park*. He later handled the graphics for the 16-bit console versions.

all about making and sharing things, and to my mind, it's the spiritual successor to *LittleBigPlanet*. We've got it working with the DualShock controller but it is camera tracked so you can do virtual sculpting and puppeteering in a really intuitive way. We're hoping it'll be a revolution in user generated content.

Though you're clearly looking forwards, we noticed you were an executive producer for *From Bedroom To Billions*, which documents the birth of the British software industry.
That whole story was me growing up. My childhood and my passion. A lot of the people in that film were my heroes when I was younger, [people] like Jeff Minter, Tony Crowther… I wanted that story told even if it was just only for my personal collection. I get tears of nostalgia watching it.

Thanks to Mark, Media Molecule and Martyn Carroll for additional help.



» [PS3] The creation mode of *LittleBigPlanet* is absoultely huge, not to mention superb, and is only limited by your very own imagination.



Perfect Dark

THE NAME'S DARK, JOANNA DARK

» N64 » RARE » 2000

After Rare's incredible success with the *James Bond* licence, many N64 owners expected a sequel to *GoldenEye* to appear on their beloved games console. Sadly, a sequel never arrived, but in its place was another stunning first-person shooter that not only proved that *GoldenEye* hadn't been a fluke, but it showed just what was possible when you were unshackled from a restrictive licence and given more creative control.

Perfect Dark tells the story of Joanna Dark, a young female spy recruited by the mysterious Carrington Institute to extract a defector from Carrington's competitor, dataDyne. Before long she's caught up in an interplanetary war between two rival factions and… well, we won't spoil it for you, because *Perfect Dark*'s twisting and turning plot is just one of the examples where it improves on Rare's earlier shooter.

Graphically it's superb as well, taking a modified version of the *GoldenEye* engine and pushing it to breaking point. It even manages a hi-res mode via the N64's expansion pack, but this does impact on the visuals, forcing slowdown, particularly when windows get shattered. And damage to windows and other parts of the environment happens regularly, thanks to the insane amount of weaponry that Joanna has access to.

The futuristic setting allowed the team to have all sorts of fun with Joanna's arsenal, and there's a mixture of both real and futuristic weaponry to choose from. Although there are conventional weapons like uzis and submachine guns, *Perfect Dark* also introduced insane offerings like the FarSight XR-20 that enabled Joanna to shoot through walls. She also had an awesome Laptop Gun that could transform into an innocuous looking laptop or be thrown down to become a sentry gun.

By far the biggest difference between the two games was *Perfect Dark*'s multiplayer mode, which delivered all sorts of new mechanics and customisation options, as well as the ability to play against AI-controlled bots for the first time.

Although it set the world alight on its release, time hasn't been kind to the original *Perfect Dark* and it has aged somewhat. Our advice? Pick up the excellent Xbox 360 HD remaster and relive the experience all over again. *


72

RETRORATED





>> It's a remake special this issue with reviews of remastered classics such as Majora's Mask, Grim Fandango and a funky update of Sega's coin-op, After Burner II



» [3DS] Pottering around in Clock Town gives you a chance to appreciate the game's visual upgrades.



The Legend Of Zelda: Majora's Mask 3D

THERE'S NO DISGUISING THE QUALITY HERE

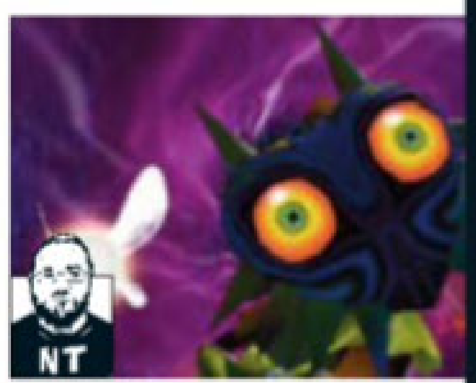
INFORMATION

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** 3DS
» **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
» **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £39.99
» **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
» **DEVELOPER:** GREZZO
» **PLAYERS:** 1

* PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN
3D After Burner II
Sega's classic blaster is the latest game to get the 3D treatment and the end result is phenomenal.



NICK
The Legend Of Zelda: Majora's Mask
An excellent update that greatly improves on the original classic.



In many ways, our anticipation for The *Legend Of Zelda: Majora's Mask* 3D mirrored the anticipation we felt for the original N64 game back in 2000. Back then, we were eager to see how Nintendo would follow up what was considered to be one of the best games of all time, *Ocarina Of Time*. This time around, our expectations had been set high thanks to Grezzo's excellent work on the 3D remake of *Ocarina Of Time*. Well, *Majora's Mask 3D* meets those expectations, and does justice to one of the best games of its generation.

» [3DS] The screen is less cluttered than on the N64, as the bottom screen now holds much of the HUD.



For those of you who missed the original N64 release, we'll quickly recap. Following on from his adventures in *Ocarina Of Time*, Link is searching for his fairy companion Navi. However, he ends up being ambushed and having his horse, Epona, stolen, before being transformed into a Deku Scrub by a nefarious Skull Kid wearing the titular mask. Not only does he need to restore his regular form, but he's got only three days to do it, because the moon is rapidly falling and will shortly obliterate the land of Termina. Luckily, with the aid of his Ocarina he can rewind time and halt the destruction of Termina while he tries to avert this lunar impact, giving him more time to solve the game's various puzzles but ensuring that most characters will forget having met him.

What surprised us most about returning to *Majora's Mask* is how different it feels to the other 3D *Zelda* games. While none of them have been anything less than very good games, they've all relied upon the template established by *Ocarina Of Time*, leading players to complain that they're rather formulaic. Not so *Majora's Mask*, though, as the game relies more heavily on interaction with non-player

BRIEF HISTORY

» Originally released for the N64 in 2000, *The Legend Of Zelda: Majora's Mask* saw Link trying to save Termina, a world just three days from destruction. Arriving late in the N64's life, it was a hit both critically and financially, but failed to match the popularity of *Ocarina Of Time*.



Give Us More 64 Make these games happen!



Sin & Punishment

The sequel on the Wii was excellent, but we still have a soft spot for the N64's essential import game. A remake would not only smooth out some of the rough edges, but provide the 3DS with another high quality game in a genre that suits handheld gaming well.



Wave Race 64

Wave Race 64's water physics still hold up today, which is remarkable for a game developed in the mid-Nineties, but they could benefit graphically from the increased power of the 3DS. Retain the classic courses and the colourful visuals, and we'll be more than happy to see it return.



WWF No Mercy

Most fans agree that *No Mercy* is the best wrestling game ever made, with fans making roster mods even today. WWE has catered to a nostalgia market before with games like *Legends Of Wrestlemania*, and this could take players right back to the height of the 'Attitude' era.



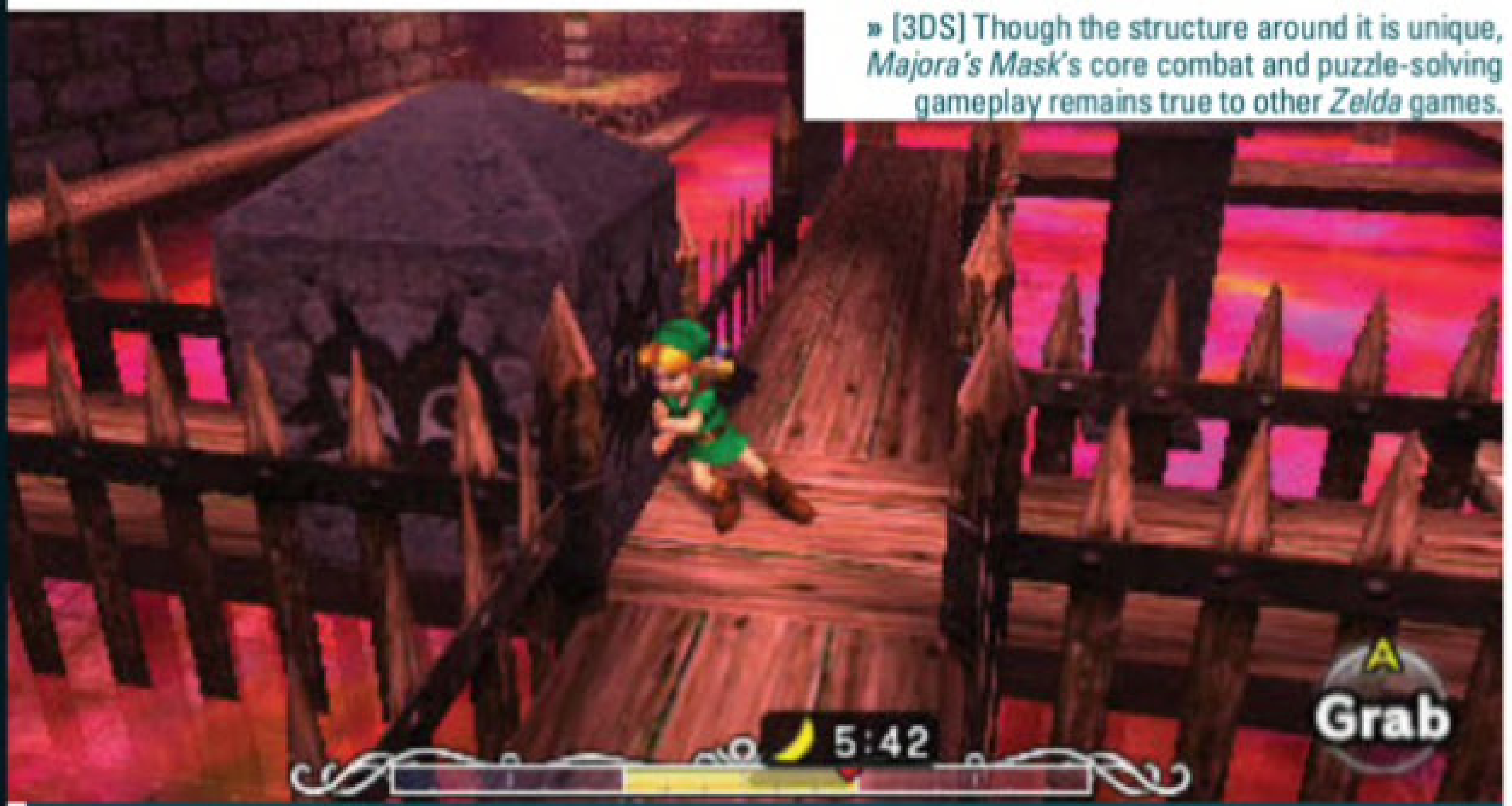
Pokémon Snap

The 3DS could bring so much to this photography game – sure, the improved visuals will make for nicer photos, and we're sure that Nintendo would want to get new *Pokémon* into the game. However, we're drooling at the prospect of a motion-controlled camera using the 3DS' gyroscope…



Beetle Adventure Racing

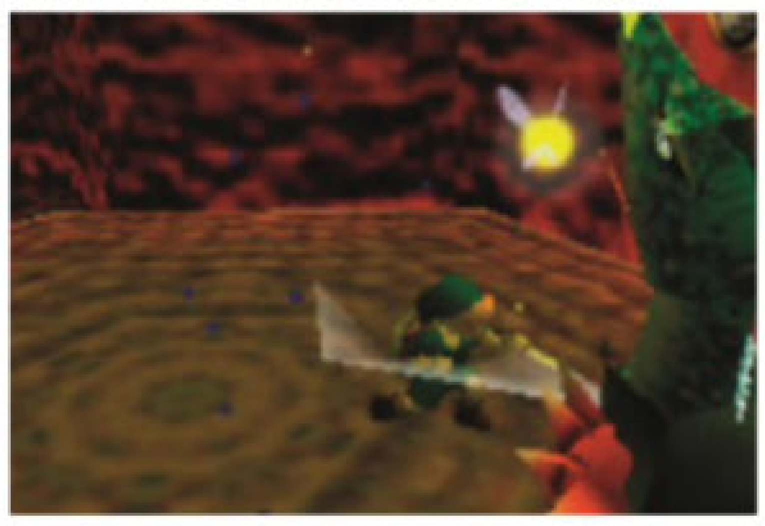
This one will never happen due to licensing issues, but, how we wish it would. We'd be interested in seeing updated gameplay – expanding the open courses with more secrets could only improve what was already one of the N64's hidden gems.



» [3DS] Though the structure around it is unique, *Majora's Mask*'s core combat and puzzle-solving gameplay remains true to other *Zelda* games.

★WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: OCARINA OF TIME (N64)



▼ SOMETHING NEW
LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK BETWEEN WORLDS (3DS)



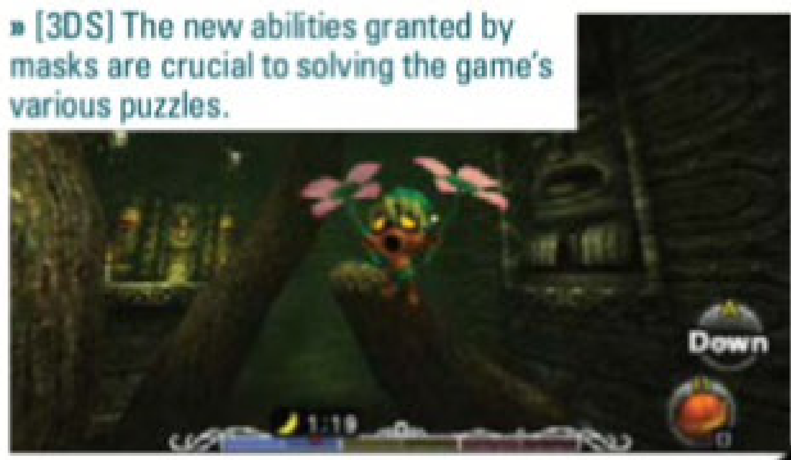
characters, whose fears and concerns contribute to a gloomy pre-apocalyptic atmosphere. With its three-day structure encouraging repeated time-hops, and colouring the way you interact with those characters, the game stands apart from its successors and actually feels far more refreshing to play now than it did 15 years ago, when the only point of comparison was its predecessor.

As brilliant as the original N64 game was, Nintendo and Grezzo have managed to make improvements in a variety of areas, the most immediately noticeable of which are upgrades to the visuals. The 3D effect is utilised well, with the moon in particular looking far more menacing with its added depth. However, even if you're playing in 2D you'll notice the difference. The original game was running up against the technical limits of the console, meaning that the frame-rate had to be kept low and textures stored at a low quality. Both issues have been addressed, with texture quality in particular taking a big step up. Many of the game's 3D models have also been given a makeover. The extent of the makeover means that it's still easy to identify as a game that originated on the N64, but provides a superior experience.

In gameplay terms, the changes are more minimal but serve a similar purpose in bringing the game up to date. The game retains the improved item system from *Ocarina Of Time 3D*, with equipment managed on the bottom screen and the HUD moved down to accompany it.

Beyond these minor functionality changes, there are some more core changes to how the game works. The most welcome is the ability to save without playing the Song Of Time, meaning that you can suspend your progress without putting yourself back to the beginning of the first day. The Song Of Double Time now allows you to bring the game to a specific hour, further reducing frustration with timed events. Lastly, the game's boss battles have been adjusted for difficulty, with Gyorg in particular having been made far less frustrating than in the original game.

The approach that Nintendo and Grezzo have both taken to ensure the quality of *Majora's Mask 3D* is to be commended. A practically identical conversion could have been released and many players would have been happy, given that the original game is still very good and remains the most individualistic 3D *Zelda* game. However, by recognising the imperfections that exist in the original game, no matter how small, they've ensured that the game will appeal both to nostalgic players and those experiencing it for the first time. ★



» [3DS] The new abilities granted by masks are crucial to solving the game's various puzzles.

In a nutshell

***Majora's Mask* is a classic which stands apart from other *Zelda* releases, and Grezzo has done a wonderful job of adapting it to its new host platform. A shining lesson in how to update classic games.**



>> **Score 93%**



» [3DS] While you only have three days to accomplish your goal, time can be rewound at will.

RETROROUND-UP

>> Every month we look at all the classics and latest releases that are available to buy or download

★PICK OF THE MONTH



» [3DS] The 3D effects are superb, particularly when planes are tailing you.

3D After Burner II

» **System:** 3DS » **Cost:** £4.49 » **Buy it from:** Nintendo eShop

We always look forward to a new 3D release from M2. The developer has rightly earned a name for creating quality conversions of classic games, and its latest release is no different. 3D *After Burner II* is quite frankly fantastic and we'll even go so far as to say that it's the best version of the game you can currently play. Granted it's never going to match the sheer gut-wrenching thrills-and-spills of the original hydraulic arcade cabinet, but let's face it, what would?

The game if you've never played it before is essentially *Space Harrier*, but your plasma-wielding dude has been swapped out for a cool F-14 Tomcat. It's essentially Yu Suzuki's tribute to *Top Gun*, but without all that rubbishy angst and Meg Ryan's terrible Eighties haircut. As with *Space Harrier* the aim of the game is to progress through each stage, shooting down as many enemies as possible, while avoiding missiles. While it lacks the impressive boss of Suzuki's earlier game, it delivers far more challenging attack patterns and it adds a small slice of strategy with the welcome addition of a thrust and barrel roll that can be used to outmaneuver other planes and missiles. It all adds up to an immensely satisfying experience, with fast-paced gameplay that still holds up impressively well.



» [3DS] The bonus stages are another aspect of the game that benefit from the 3D makeover.



» [3DS] The emulation is excellent, while plenty of options are included to simulate the original set-ups.

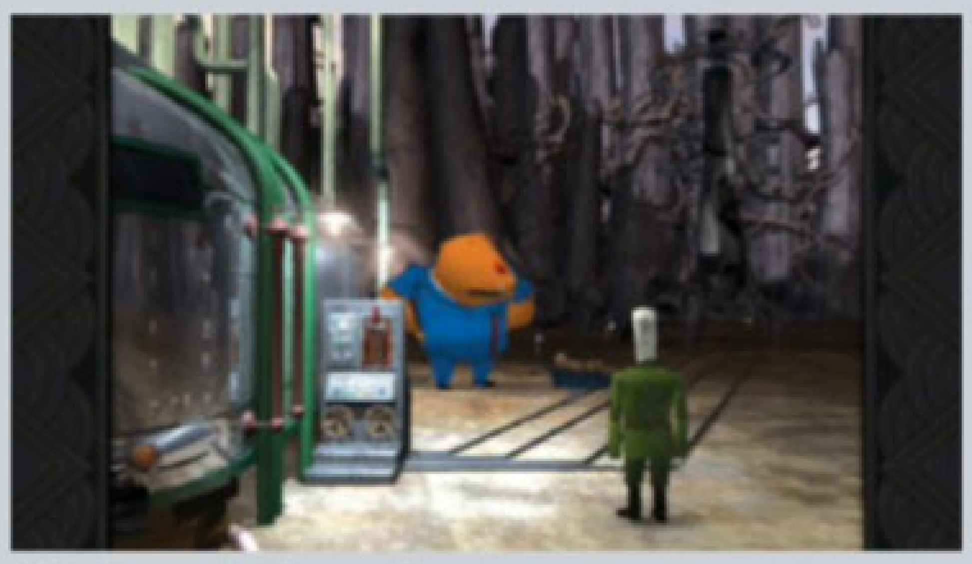
As good as *After burner*'s gameplay is, and it's very, very good, it's the stunning 3D that really turns this into a must own download. Many of M2's converted games have possessed very good 3D, but it's astonishingly good on *After Burner II*, more so when you play on the New 3DS. It's convincing, makes it a lot easier to judge incoming missiles and also looks great whenever fighters and missiles approach you from behind.

M2's conversion is loaded with extras too, allowing you to tweak all sorts of parameters. You can simulate the movement of the original *After Burner* cabinet, add translucency effects, reskin the top screen to emulate the original cabinets – complete with the flashing warning lights – tweak the music and fiddle with numerous other aspects of the game. You can even apply the thrust stick to the Circle Pad Pro (or second stick on the New 3DS) and save replays.

Best of all, though, is the surprise that awaits you on completing the game. A brand new mode is unlocked that effectively rearranges the stages and adds the 'Burst' gauge from *After Burner Climax*, which allows you to slow down the game to rack up huge points.

A great port then that manages to improve on the original.

90%



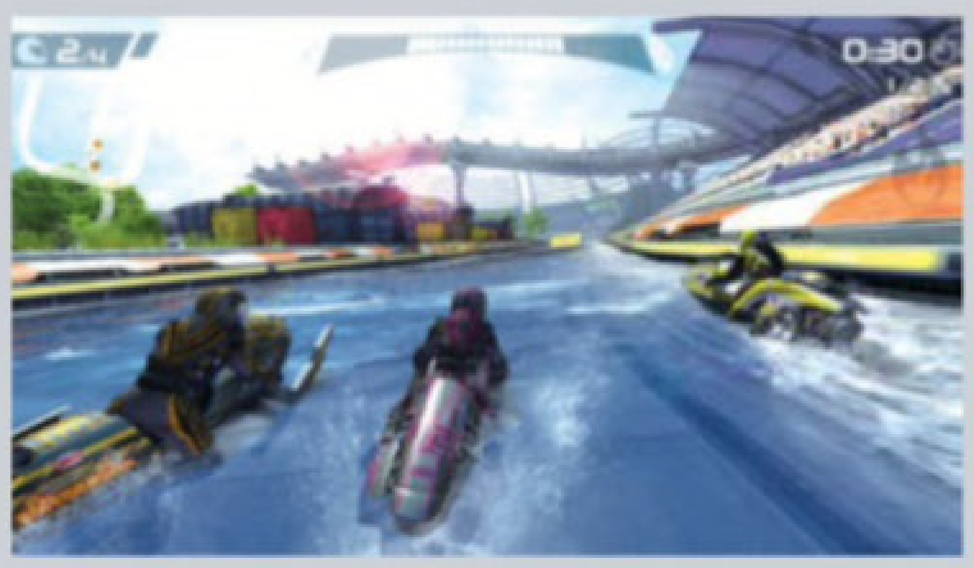
Grim Fandango Remastered

» **System:** PS Vita (tested) PS4, PC
» **Buy it for:** £11.99
» **Buy it from:** PSN, Steampowered.com

Listen to the commentary of *Grim Fandango* and it's clear that it's a labour of love for Tim and his team. What's less clear is why so little work has been actually done to it. Yes there are new lighting effects and Manny looks better, but there appears to be very little tinkering done to the game engine, which is disappointing. More successful is the new control method that makes Manny far easier to control. It's not perfect, but it's far better than the original option. It's also buggy, with the Vita version crashing on us many times for no apparent reason.

Despite the lacklustre port, the game itself holds up very well. It suffers from the occasional baffling puzzle, but the dialogue, character design and pacing still feel fresh, making it a must play for fans and newcomers.

77%



Riptide GP2

» **System:** Xbox One
» **Buy it for:** £3.99
» **Buy it from:** Xbox Live

Let's get the bad out of the way first, shall we? *Riptide GP2* is one ugly looking game. Fortunately, while the visuals are decidedly original Xbox era, the high frame-rate and convincing water physics make it fantastic fun to play. There are a large number of tracks to learn, a solid selection of jet bikes to unlock and plenty of tricks to play around with and master. The 60-level campaign mode is nice and lengthy and it is split between various gameplay modes that range from simply outracing your opponents to scoring as many tricks as possible. Online play is supported, but a special mention should go to the local multiplayer mode, that calls to mind the rather wonderful *Wave Race 64*. Vector Unit's game may look a little cheap, but it is exceedingly cheerful, particularly at its crazy pricepoint of just under a £5.

80%



3D Fantasy Zone

» **System:** 3DS
» **Buy it for:** £4.49
» **Buy it from:** Nintendo eShop

Is there any game M2 won't convert to 3D? *Fantasy Zone* is the latest Sega arcade game to get said treatment and it's another highly delectable port. The 3D, although not as in your face as the brilliant *After Burner II* port, still delivers a nice sense of depth, while there are plenty of configurations to play around with, including extra bosses from the popular Master System port. New to this version of the game is the ability to bank coins and also the option to extend the duration of your power-ups (although this does take a fair amount of grinding) and a whole new mode that has you playing as Opa-Opa's brother, Upa-Upa. The coin banking is extremely useful, as *Fantasy Zone* gets hard very quickly. In fact it's a little too hard at times, with a difficulty that belies its cute visuals.

75%

Welcome to Homebrew



>> I am saddened to hear about the nasty-looking cease and desist email that was sent to developer Hipoonios over his free Amiga game that used the Smurfs. Companies are completely within their rights to do that legally, of course, but it never reflects well on them and could have been handled far better than it was



» [ZX Spectrum] Playing Mooo-oon Patrol?

IT'S GOOD TO BE BAD

Shadow Of The Beef is our pick for new terrible games competition

Originally inspired by the games of the almost legendary Cassette 50, the yearly Comp. Sys.Sinclair Crap Game Competition is an excuse for Spectrum fans to produce amusingly bad games. So it shouldn't come as a surprise that most of the entries are pretty 'craptastic' affairs, because that's what the authors are all aiming for, with the coveted prize for producing the worst game being to host the next iteration of the competition. The releases cover a range of daft scenarios including a baffling shopping trip around Ikea, a re-imagining of *Flappy Bird* as a text adventure, and even a variant of *Sokoban* where moves are earned by completing sums. But, somehow, amongst the deliberate dross there are usually a couple of games that actually fail at being bad and manage to be playable in some form.

Our favourite this year is the game that technically lost the competition since it was judged to be the best entry of 2014; *Shadow Of The Beef* is an action game starring a cow which, having made a daring escape from the local abattoir, is legging it through the countryside in search of safety, while avoiding bees and lightning. There also needs to be a special mention for *Bob's New Kidney* which simultaneously manages to be a *Decathlon*-style key mashing game, a celebration of World Of Spectrum forum regular Bermondsy Bob's successful kidney transplant and a plug for www.OrganDonation.NHS.uk

We're going to mention *Horace Goes Peeing* as well because it has a wonderful title and, as long as players are willing to fight the slow controls, it does offer some fun. Kikstart.eu/csscgc-2014-spec heads over to the official CSSCGC 2014 website with all of the entries and results.

> "Daft scenarios include a baffling shopping trip around Ikea"

Incoming

We very excited to see a final version of Wanders: Chained In Darkness. It's looking pretty darn good

KIKSTART.EU/MOONSPIRE-PRV-C64



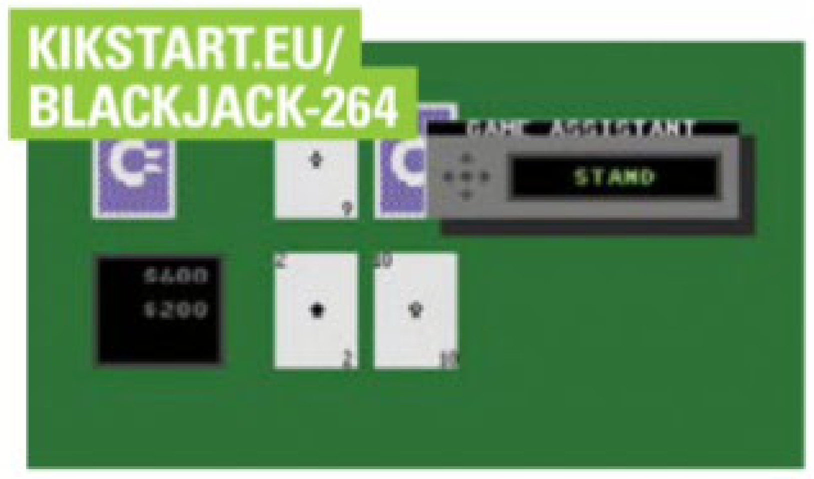
▲ A preview of the metallic looking flick screen action game *Moonspire* for the C64 is available to download.

▼ *What Do You Do It Now?* is a small but insanely hard Global Game Jam release for Atari 8-bits.



KIKSTART.EU/WDYDIN-A8

KIKSTART.EU/BLACKJACK-264



▲ The cards are on the virtual table so place your bets with *Blackjack* for the Commodore C16 and Plus/4.

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at:
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

OPEN THE BOX

We reviewed Lemming880's brightly-coloured Amiga platformer, *Boxx,* back in issue 135 where it received a score of 63%. Well now there's *Boxx 2* which has far more screens to play through, and offers quite a few improvements over the original. We've given it a quick play and enjoyed what we've seen so far, but as before, we'd recommend using an Amiga 1200 for *Boxx 2* even though it will work well on an A500 or A600. Kikstart.eu/boxx-2-amiga and Kikstart.eu/boxx-2-adf go to a few pages on Aminet for the hard disk and floppy versions respectively.



» [Amiga] Time for a refreshing dip.



» [C64] The attention to detail in the conversion is brillaint.

BOMBS AWAY

Fans of Konami's arcade blaster *Scramble* might want to download the recently released C64 conversion since it's remarkably close to the original game, more so than any previous version on the Breadbin in fact. The code was written from scratch by developer Thomas Kite whose attention to detail needs to be noted; everything has been reproduced with surprising accuracy from the contours of the scrolling landscape to the colour transitions that happen between stages. It's still being tweaked, but Kikstart.eu/scramble-c64 goes to the CSDb entry for the most recent version.

▼ *Wanderers: Chained In The Darkness* is an RPG for the Spectrum with a long name and some excellent presentation.



KIKSTART.EU/WANDERERS-DARKNESS-SPEC

Homebrew heroes



Ralph Baer's Pinball was a game for the Odyssey2 which was written back in the day but not completed. Michael Thomasson was the man Ralph approached about resurrecting the project

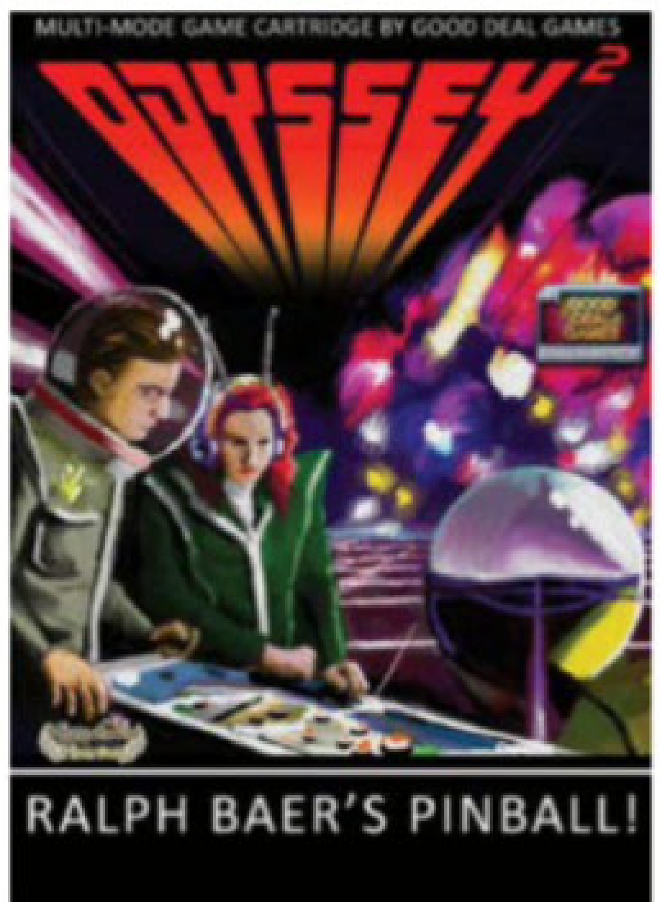
Where did the idea for *Ralph Baer's Pinball* come from?
Well, it has been on the backburner for almost a decade. My good friend Leonard Herman, author of *Phoenix: The Fall* and *Rise Of Videogames* first introduced me to Ralph Baer. We used to write for *Classic Gamer Magazine* back in the day and over time became good friends working on several projects together. We used to share booths at various trade shows, and Ralph would join us at some signing autographs and demonstrating the famous Brown Box. Over time, Ralph and I also became close. I frequented his home in New Hampshire on several occasions and helped him with multiple projects including helping him design a toy. He saw me selling my homebrew titles and mentioned his incomplete *Pinball* game for the Odyssey2 console. He asked if I'd be able to finish it.

Odyssey programming was beyond my skills, as I had not developed for the Magnavox console before. As a result, I had to find help. We had several missteps, as several programmers dropped off the development of the game over the years, in essence resetting the project. Eventually Martijn Wenting of Revival Studios came to our rescue. The three of us, Martijn, Ralph and myself worked hand in hand in updating and completing the game. Leonard assisted us with the Manual.

And roughly how long did it take to develop?
Well, it has been in the works for almost a decade, but the most of the work was completed in the last two years.

Did Ralph Baer get a chance to play the finished game?
Sadly, he did not. We were still trying to squash some of the final bugs when we lost him. But I was one of his last visitors before he passed, and I presented him with all the 'feelies'. He was particularly impressed with it and commented on the patch.

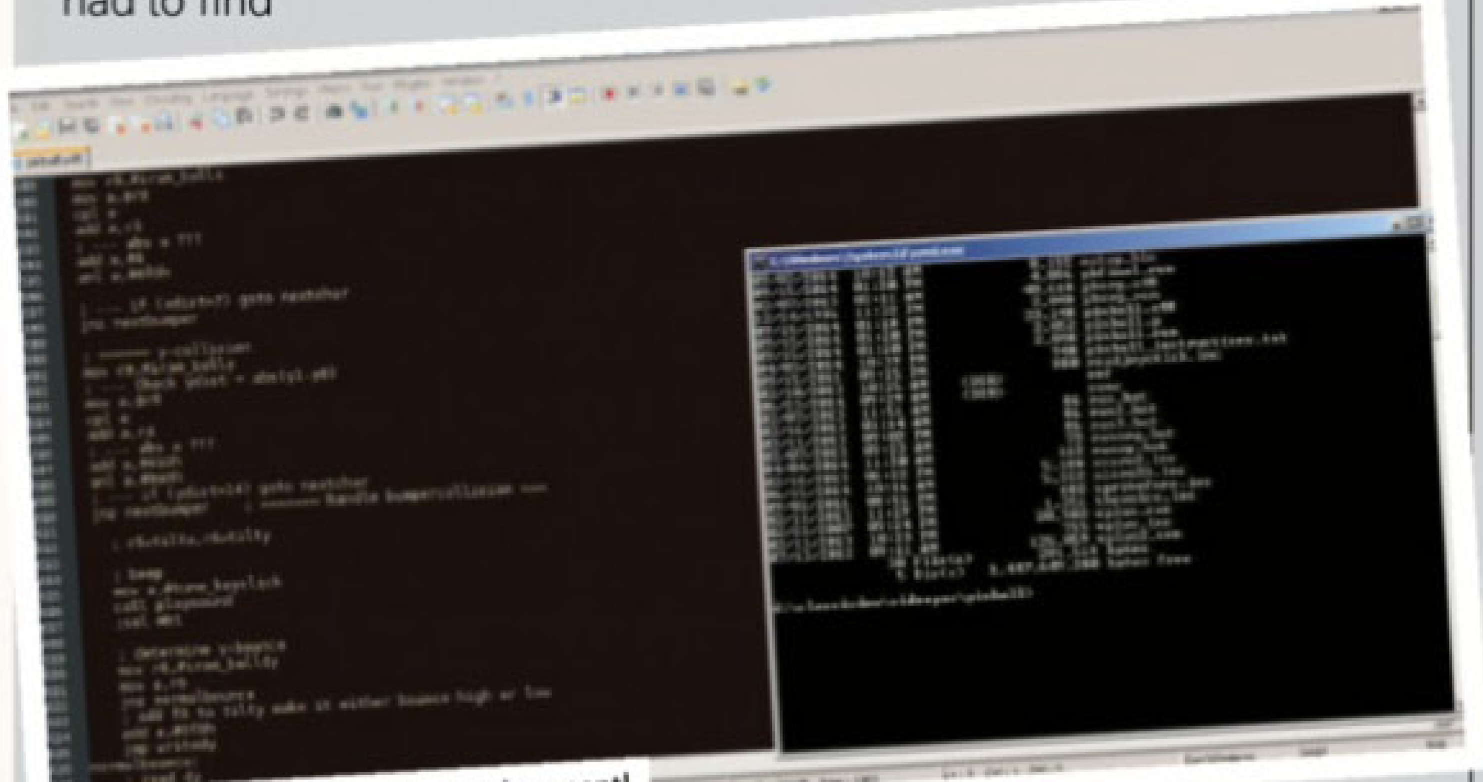
One other thing I want to mention is that Ralph didn't even believe that there was a vintage photo of him with the Odyssey2. One day while visiting, I begged him to let me look through all his old photos. While he was napping, I spent several hours rummaging and just when I was about to give up, there it was, the only known photo of the two of them together. It was the icing on the cake for the project!



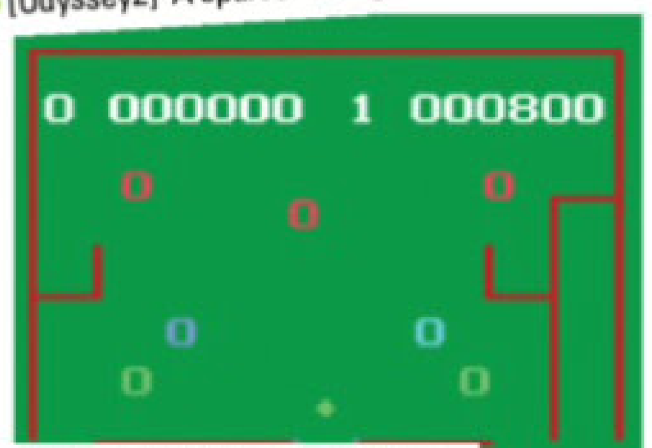
» The authentic-looking cover art.

The packaging and artwork look authentic, how long did they take to produce?
I'm friends with Mike Mika (previously with Digital Eclipse) and he was posting some of his artwork on Facebook just about the time the revived project took off. A lot of his artwork was reminiscent of what we were looking for, so I asked him to contribute and he came on board in grand style.

Do you have any projects on the go that our readers would be interested in?
Well, we are about to release the world's first Atari 2600 game featuring a high resolution scrolling bitmap called *Sunset Drive.* It uses just about every trick in the book to be the first game of its kind! We have a few other surprises in the works, but I'm not spilling the beans just yet...



» [Odyssey2] A sparse coding environment!



» [Odyssey2] An early prototype.



» [Odyssey2] *Ralph Baer's Pinball.*

RGCD 16K CARTRIDGE COMPETITION

» **FORMAT:** COMMODORE 64 » **DEVELOPER:** VARIOUS
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/RGCD-16K-2014 » **PRICE:** FREE

The now annual RGCD 16K cartridge game competition has become one of the high points of the C64 calendar. The latest instalment saw 17 new games with some taking their cues from titles on current generation hardware like one button action game *Pixel City Skater* or the fun but tricky vertically scrolling dodge 'em up action provided by *Paper Plane*. There are also ports of the popular C16 action game *Tutti Frutti* and Fickle, Malcolm "Mazezam" Tyrrell's port of his own VIC 20 release where a ball roams mazes in search of hearts.

It won't come as a shock that *Race* is a racing game, but it does support up to eight players using the recent Inception adapter; sadly there are no AI cars so lone players have to treat it as a race against the clock. *Penultimate Fantasy* somehow crams a functional and graphically attractive RPG into just 16K – presumably using magic – whilst some maze action is dished up by *Brilliant Maze* and *Toyz* offers some single screen block pushing puzzles that'll take quite a bit of lateral thought.

Then we have *Tiger Claw*, which looks like a enhanced Bruce Lee style affair but suffers from a high difficulty and troublesome controls, while *Voivod Attack* is a challenging blaster with a steampunk look to the graphics and *Aviator Arcade* is a more traditionally styled scrolling shooter with some trigger happy enemies that is fun to play.

We haven't got the space to cover all of the releases and some of the games can possibly be classified as previews with a meatier version on the way – in *Tutti Frutti's* case a bug fixed version is already available at Kikstart.eu/tutti-c64 – but this year's competition has produced some great games and covered quite a range of genres in the process, with the majority of releases offering solid gameplay. Why not give the entries a go to see which titles take your fancy?

92%

RETRO GAMER SIZZLER



» [C64] Unashamed blasting action.



» [C64] That's a knarly jump there, dude.



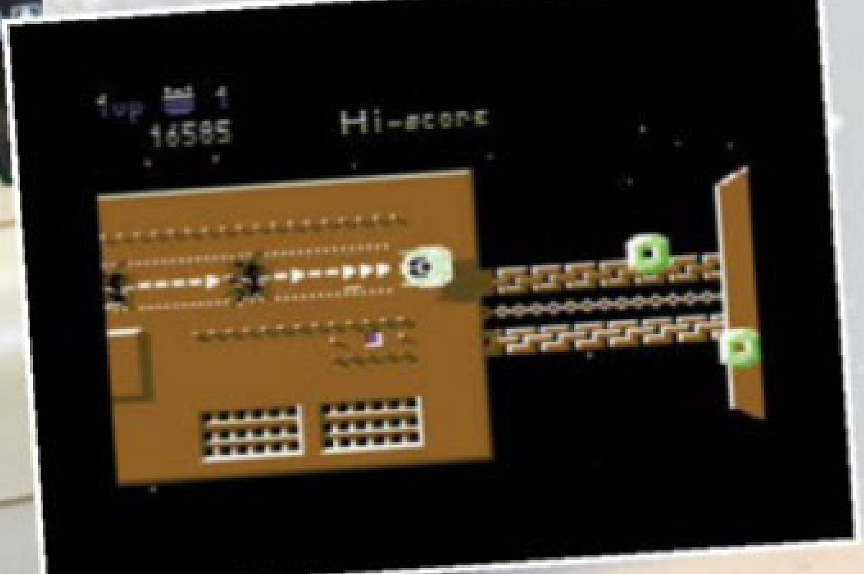
» [C64] Hmm. which to push first?

Make this

Every month our very own Jason Kelk will be teaching you handy new programming techniques. This month: learning from the past

NEW

1 When designing games it helps to have a knowledge of what came before. Games like *Uridium* on the C64 are great examples because they're playable and well presented, they never keep the player waiting for something to happen during breaks or glitching as screens are changed.

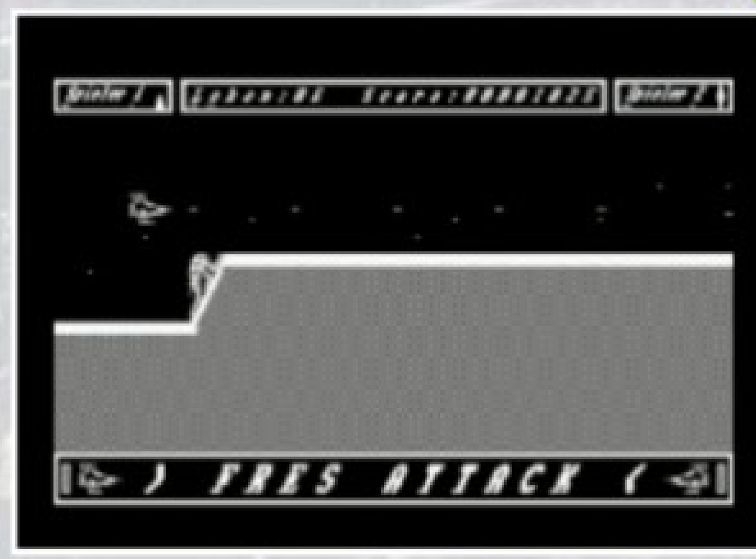




2 Along with playing lots of decent games, we can learn lessons from the bad ones as well. For example, *Robobolt* on the C64 might be appalling to play but it's worth a few goes to understand what went wrong in order to avoid the same pitfalls.

3 Games that are deliberately bad like all of the entries for the CSS Crap Game Competition can be played to analyse which decisions were taken to break them. Sometimes the changes to a design are subtle but the overall result can be devastating.





4 Play lots of games and to understand where the devs were going with the design. Look at titles from other platforms, too, for example, something like *Fres Attack* on the Amstrad CPC offers some hints about designing levels with fast scrolling.

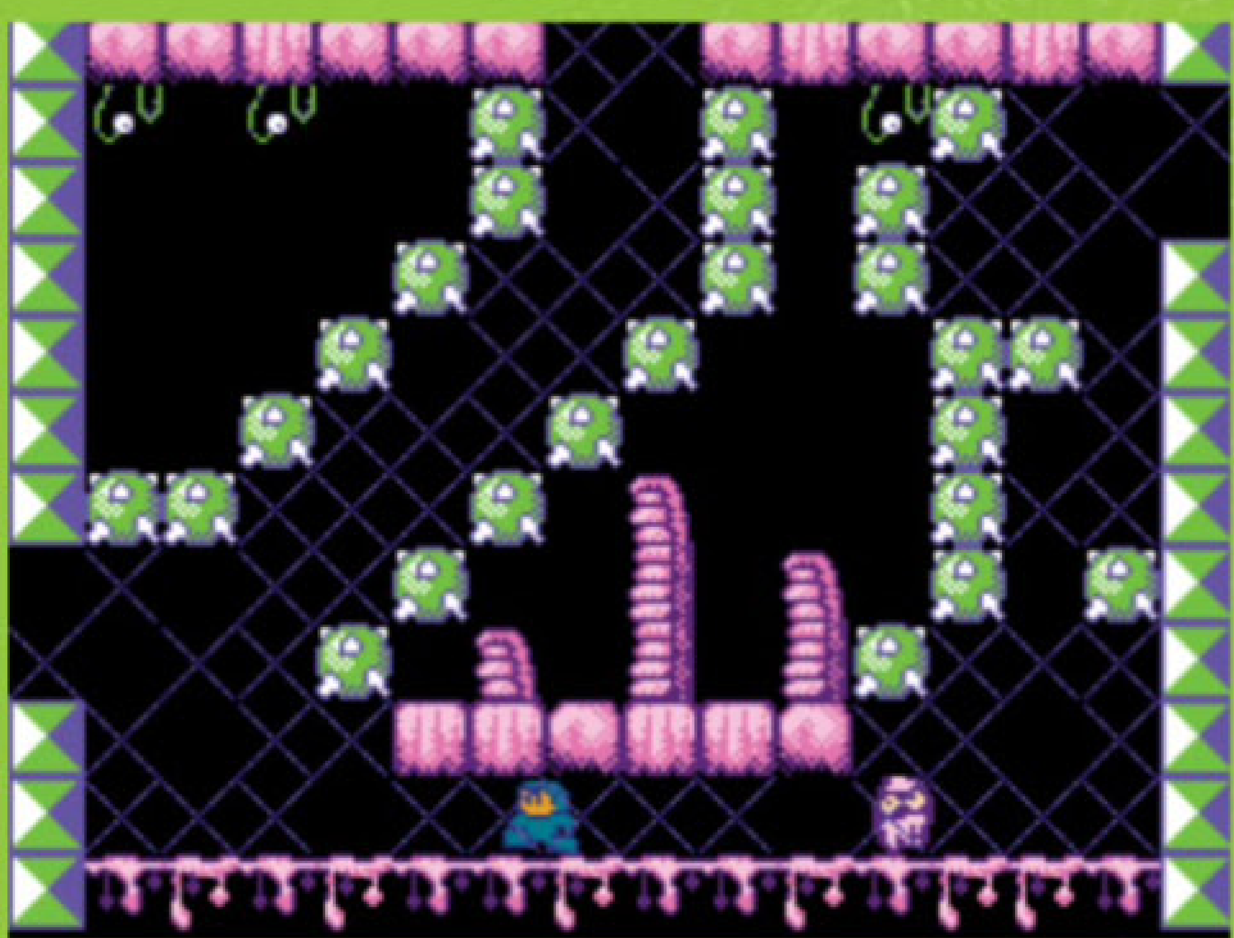
JET PACO

» **FORMAT:** NINTENDO NES » **DEVELOPER:** THE MOJON TWINS
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/JET-PACO-NES » **PRICE:** FREE

In the not too distant future, spaceships are powered by energonia crystals which are about six feet tall and cost an absolute fortune. So Paco Rebollez's job is to salvage these crystals from derelict craft and, since all of the long distance scans are saying that the latest target might have as many as twenty crystals to collect, he's already started making plans for his retirement.

These plans might be somewhat premature because whilst the hulk is indeed loaded with energonia crystals, it's also inhabited by some of the less pleasant locals and they're not best pleased when it comes to interlopers. Paco will therefore have to be careful while using the buttock-mounted propulsion system incorporated into his spacesuit to fly around. There are two modes selectable from the menu, some detailed in-game graphics and a collection of very good soundtracks wrapped around a difficult but enjoyable platformer.

89%



» [NES] Is that a miffed local? Well, time to hightail it out of here.

PUSHER

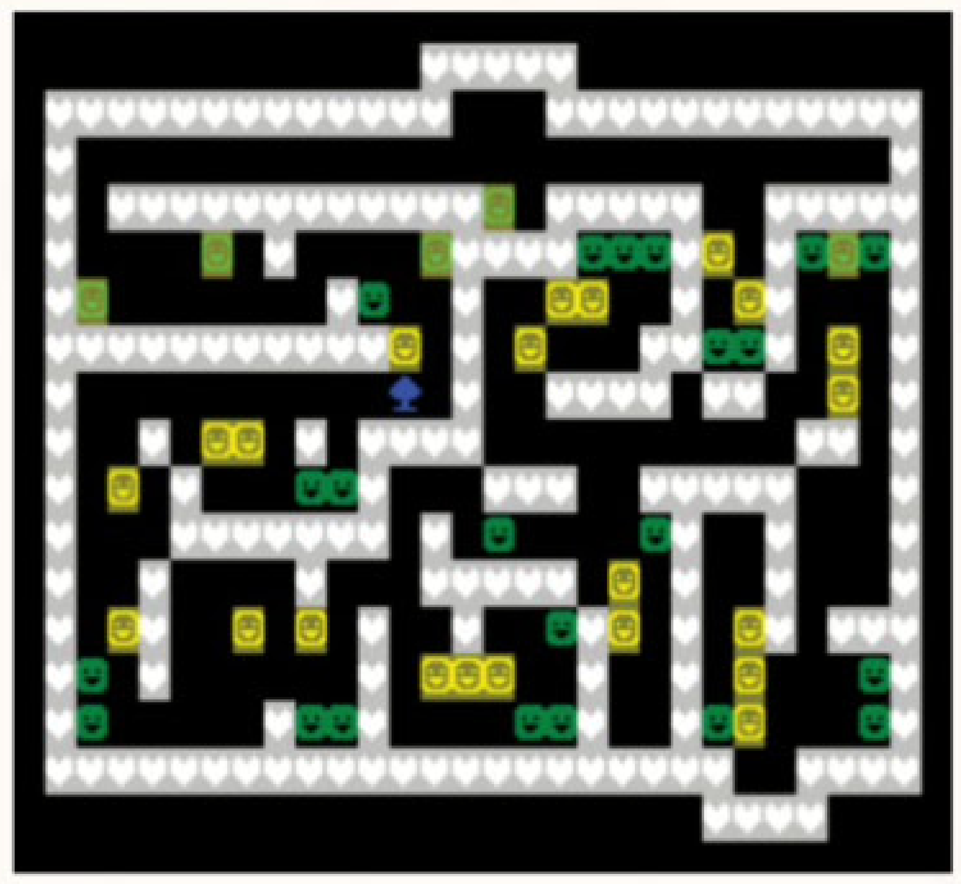
» **FORMAT:** DOS » **DEVELOPER:** WHIZART » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/PUSHER-DOS » **PRICE:** FREE

The world of *Pusher* is a simple one; the yellow blocks with happy faces need to be moved until they're on top of the green spaces. Care must be taken to avoid shoving them into places they can't be retrieved from since that makes the level impossible to finish.

It can be considered as more of a tech demo since the programmer has tried to cram everything into just 512 bytes, but *Pusher* is still a playable puzzle game. There is only the one level but more technically minded gamers have the option of designing their own to challenge friends with.

Pusher was written for play on a DOS-based PC but can be persuaded to run under Windows with DOSBox.

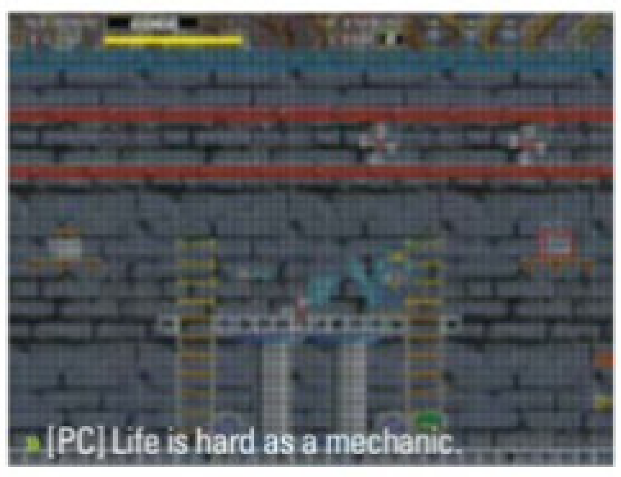
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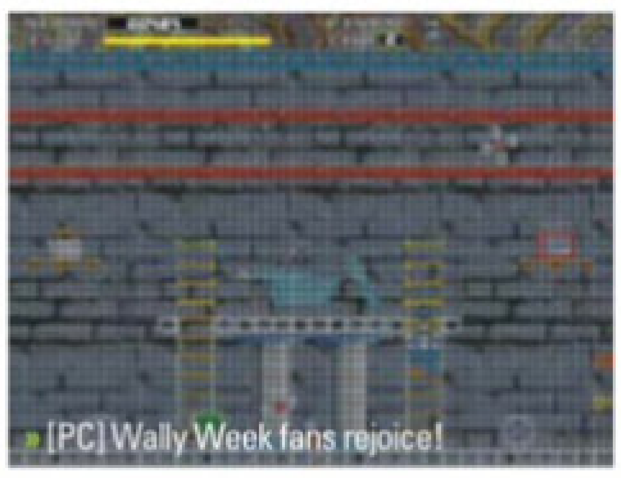
» [PC] When push comes to shove its time to solve puzzles.

AUTOMANIA

» **FORMAT:** WINDOWS » **DEVELOPER:** RICHARD LANGFORD
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/AUTOMANIA-WIN » **PRICE:** FREE



» [PC] Life is hard as a mechanic.



» [PC] Wally Week fans rejoice!

***Automania* was the first game starring Wally Week and is a simple platform-based affair; Wally has been tasked with assembling cars but, since he's rather untidy, the workshop is littered with parts and things to avoid, some of which appear to have developed a life of their own!** The game takes place over two screens; one is the store room where parts for the current car are strewn all over the unstable looking shelving units and the other is the garage where shiny new vehicles are assembled on the lift.

All of the graphics and sound have been given a serious refit but the fetch and carry gameplay remains true to Mikro-Gen's Spectrum release. We did feel that this remake was tougher than what was an already difficult original, but Wally Week fans and those who like a good challenging platformer should feel right at home in this now refurbished garage.

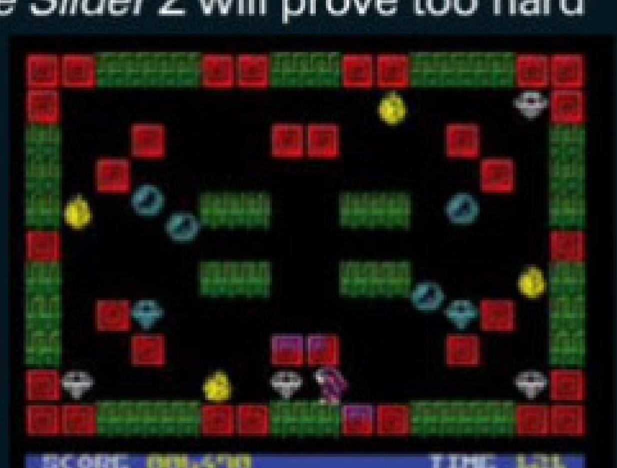
82%

ICE SLIDER Z

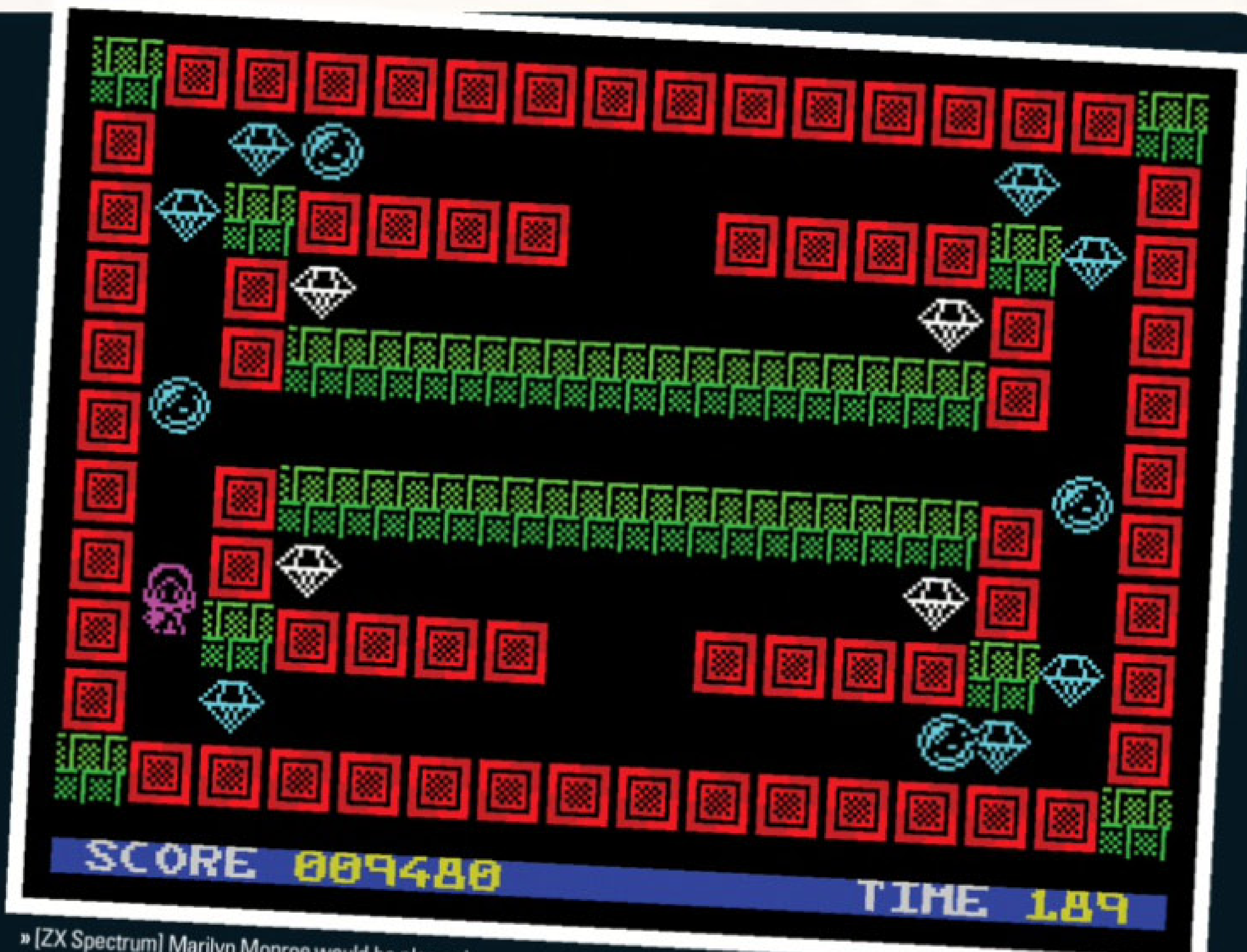
» **FORMAT:** SINCLAIR SPECTRUM » **DEVELOPER:** EGOTRIP
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/ICE-SLIDER-SPEC » **PRICE:** FREE

Amy is on a mission to collect diamonds – they are, after all, a girl's best friend – but the best source locally are a series of rooms which also contain hazards which need to be avoided. Our heroine also has a slight problem; once she's in motion, there are few things that will stop her so, although her direction can be changed, Amy spends a lot of time either running into or bouncing off the walls.

The controls do add an interesting twist to the single screen action but we feel that *Ice Slider Z* will prove too hard for the majority of players. The difficulty has been set high so most people will be struggling by the fourth level and the later stages need pixel accuracy which the constant movement gets in the way of.



78%



» [ZX Spectrum] Marilyn Monroe would be pleased.

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STAR LETTER

A COMPELLING VISION

Hi **RG,**

I can't thank you enough for the feature on the Microvision in issue 136! It's been great to see a machine I had as a child finally represented in the magazine, even if it is rather basic by even retro standards. I'm sure many of your readers wouldn't have heard of it either, as even my more knowledgeable gaming friends tend to think of the Lynx and Game Boy as the first handheld consoles.

With that in mind, perhaps you should cover these early, formative systems with more prominence? I can't imagine that many people know about early systems like the Fairchild Channel F and the Philips Videopac G7000. That's the kind of knowledge that will only spread with the help of magazines like **Retro Gamer**, and I'd love to see one of these machines on the cover of the magazine one day.

Keep up the good work,

Danny Field

Hi Danny, we're glad you enjoyed the feature. We love to educate people about the less well-known aspects of retro gaming, and the Microvision feature was a perfect way of doing that. You'll certainly see this sort of feature continue to appear in the magazine as long as we continue to make it.

As for increasing coverage, we might not go that far. One of the things about Retro Gamer is that we need to balance educating our readers and entertaining them, and many people buy the magazine for nostalgia. That means that we're likely to see greater audience response for popular machines like the Spectrum, SNES and PlayStation than early machines made when the market was much smaller. That said, you've reminded us that every machine has its audience, even those that are largely forgotten, so have a prize on us.





» Is this machine still just too new for **Retro Gamer**? Nick Moudios believes so.

RG IN REVIEW

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

I beg you, heed my advice. Please go back to the first 30 issues and rediscover what your magazine is all about. It is losing its lustre. It's looking more and more like the other magazines, slowly but surely, especially seeing a PlayStation on the cover of the most recent one in Australia. There are over 1000 games alone on the Atari ST and Amiga, you guys have just scratched the surface. You are not running out of games. I think you should focus more on reviewing games and giving them a score, like the old *ST Format, Ace, Zzap!64* etc. People want to hear your opinions and revisit the old days with a score. People also look to your magazine to buy games so a score of the games would help. By transitioning into a review magazine you would never run out of games. I am only writing because I love the magazine and adore you guys.

Regards,

Nick Moudios



DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Virtual Boy

Nick's Virtual Boy was the subject of much fascination upon its arrival in the office, as our colleagues on Play and games™ hadn't ever played the machine. They generally enjoyed their time with *Wario Land* and *Galactic Pinball* – until the time came to stop playing, and eye pain kicked in.

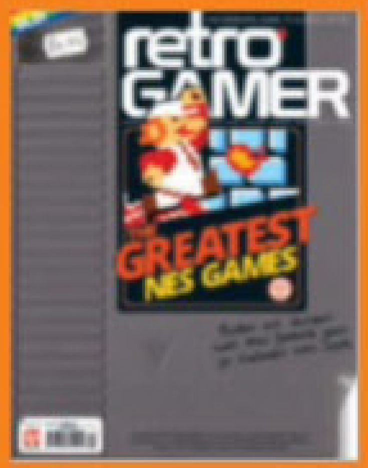
Hi Nick, thanks for your input – whether you liked or disliked something, we do appreciate feedback. With that said, history moves on and some things that weren't considered retro a decade ago are broadly accepted as such now. You're not the only person to have mentioned that the inclusion of a PlayStation feature wasn't to their tastes, but the majority of responses we've received have been positive.

As for reviews, we've avoided scoring old games for a reason. Some games are misjudged upon launch, but these cases are few and far between – we remember seeing *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike* receive fairly average scores, but it's now accepted as being one of the best 2D fighting games ever. However, for the majority of games that were given a fair shake, reviews would be redundant – we're not sure what readers would gain from seeing us give *Super Mario Bros 3* a high score, nor *Rise Of The Robots* a low one.



Don't forget to follow us online for all the latest retro updates

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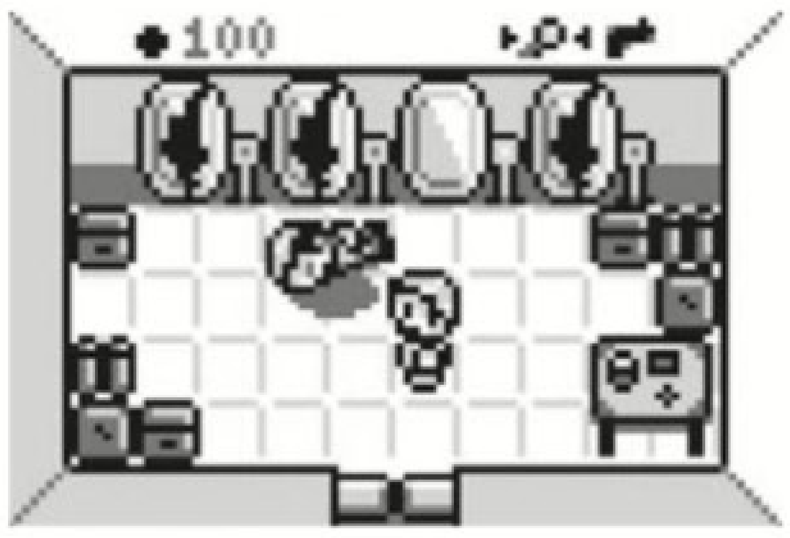
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CALCULATED PLANS

Hi **Retro Gamer**,

I love the magazine. I've subscribed on and off for many years now. I was wondering if you guys ever covered the following two topics. If so, could you let me know which issue so I can read up more on it? If not, perhaps a feature in the future!

Hardware: Texas Instruments graphing calculators. Specifically, models like the TI-83 and TI-83 plus which were widespread in American high schools in the late Nineties/early Noughties. While these devices were ostensibly for use in helping you graph science experiments and solve calculus problems, they were also great ways to play games in class. I didn't grow up in the home computer era that gets so much love in your magazine, but TI-83 gaming does remind me a lot of what I read about those systems. The TI-83 had a built-in eccentric version of BASIC which you could use to create RPGs and text adventures on the calculator itself. But the really impressive games were written in Assembly for custom operating systems like MirageOS. Some of my favorites were *Uncle Worm* (a fun variation on traditional *Snake*), conversions of *Tetris*, *Mega Man*, and *Moon Patrol*, and a game called *Falldown*.



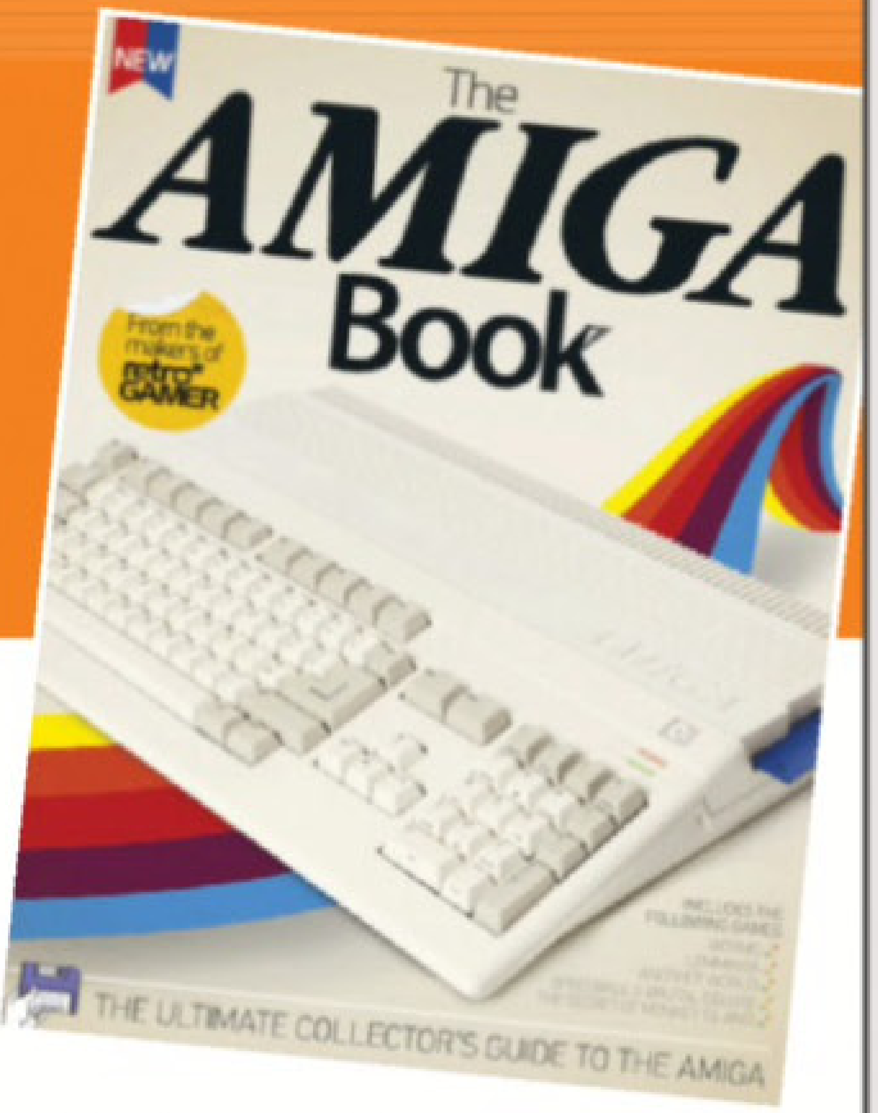
» [TI-83+] Graphing calculators are capable of surprisingly complex games such as mini-RPG *Desolate*.

Software: Every few years I get the itch to go back and play the original *Rollercoaster Tycoon*. With the announcement of a new entry in this series, I feel it coming on again. It's by far my favourite simulation game. The mechanics are great (well, not literally – the actual mechanics you had to hire were expensive and could take a long time to get to broken down rides).

There were endless ways to design innovative rollercoasters, especially in the constraints of different geographies and budgets. There's something especially nostalgic in the amusement park sounds of the game. I also loved the sprite work in the first two games in the series. The series didn't make the transition well to 3D, but the first two entries and their expansion packs were something special.

Michael Bentley

Thanks for the kind words, Michael. Hopefully you enjoyed the In The Chair feature with *Rollercoaster Tycoon* designer Chris Sawyer last issue! We haven't actually covered either topic directly before, and both are interesting so we'll see what we can do in the future.



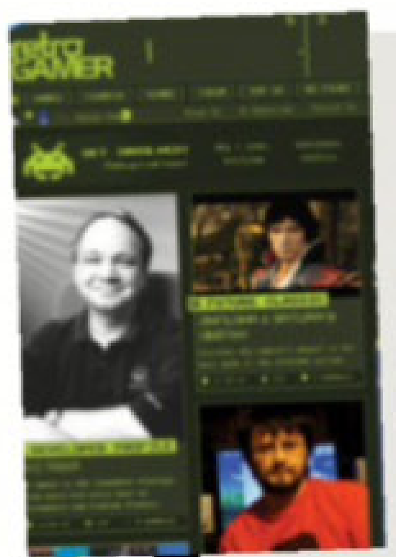
GURU MEDITATION

Hi **RG**,

I noticed that **The Amiga Book** is out of stock? Will there be a reprint of it? Here in the Netherlands it's very hard to get. Online copies are now being offered for twice the price.

Sascha Glade

Many readers worldwide are having the same problem as Sascha, and we're sorry you've had trouble finding it – it has been extremely popular! The excellent response that this compendium of great Amiga content has received means that we'll certainly be looking into the possibility of a reprint. In the meantime, digital copies of The Amiga Book are available via greatdigitalmags.com.



From the forum

» www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

Your favourite SNES rpg?



samhain81
Secret Of Mana - the music alone makes this game a piece of art. My favourite song being *I Won't Forget*. Quite the bitter irony there.

Mayhem
A Link To The Past, if it counts as an RPG. Otherwise *Final Fantasy VI* (aka *III* in the US) all the way. WAY better than *VII*, heh…

Hiro
Chrono Trigger. Simply awesome, great story and battle system, just bested by its sequel *Chrono Cross*. *Tales Of Phantasia* (still the best game in the series together with *Tales Of Eternia* for me) and *Front Mission 2* are very close.

Mire Mare
I love *Secret Of Mana*. I bought it on the SNES and then again on Wii Virtual Console and iOS. The real-time combat really adds to the gameplay.

stvd
For "proper" RPG, *Chrono Trigger*. The characters/setting/theme made it that bit different to all the other RPGs at the time. Story, graphics,sound, everything about it was brilliant. *Zelda ALTTP* (if these types are acceptable) is another 10/10 game.

Antiriad2097
Mystic Quest, the enjoyable *Zelda* game.

Whatzername
Final Fantasy IV (*II* in the west to clarify). I love Cecil and his story, and the music gives me goosebumps the whole game through – especially the battle theme. I have actually played it through twice, first on the GBA and then the remake on DS. That's how much I love it!

paranoid marvin
Zelda, if it classes as an RPG. Personally I think it is.

gman72
Secret Of Mana. Gorgeous and epic.

TheDude18
Zelda: A Link To The Past. That's as close to an RPG I've played!

retro GAMER

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TALKING SHOP
One-on-ones with the retro indie community

Warez

Warez is a fairly recent shop that's already creating interest for its crossover of retro and board gaming. Bradley Templeton tells us why


» Prices are competitive and you'll occasionally find the odd import game at a good price.

When was Warez first set up and why did you choose Winton?
Warez was set up in February 2012, initially as a retro games and computer store. We chose Winton for a combination of factors but foremost in our minds was the heavy student demographic of the area.

What systems do you tend to specialise in?
We stock most things that are not too obscure, however, I would say our main trade is in Nintendo and Sega 8-bit or 16-bit systems. These tend to be what everyone is familiar with from their youth.

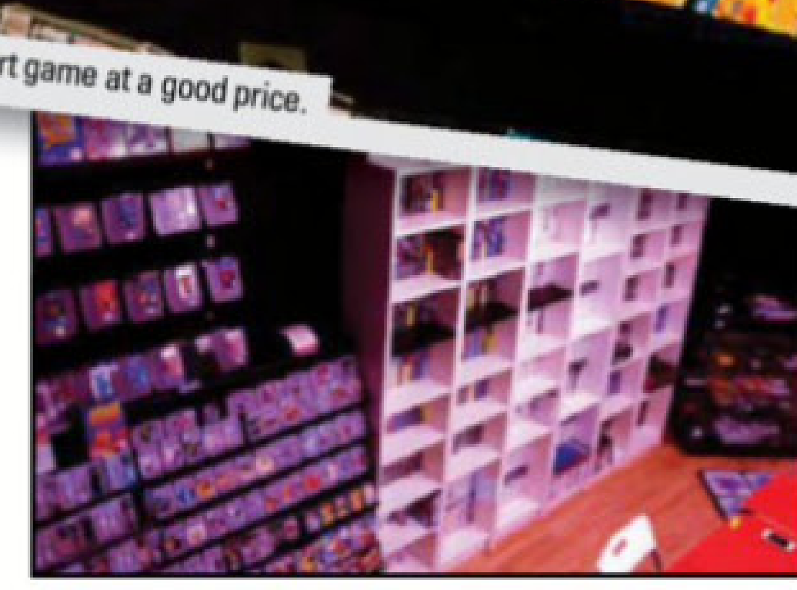
How do you set prices and do you have an online shop?
We do have an online shop at www.retrowarez.co.uk – we set prices based off an average of the of the latest completed listings on eBay, and then discount them based off the stock we have. Our overall aim is to be cheaper than most online auction sites.

Just how competitive is selling retro games?
We are the only retailer specializing in purely retro videogames in the area, so our competition isn't really all that well defined. We don't feel any ill effects from all the usual suspects though.

Do you ever run any videogame competitions at Warez?
We do indeed! Just this week we have a *Super Smash Bros.* Tournament with more planned in the future. We also host big screen playthroughs when new releases come out – such as the recent *Resident Evil HD* remake and later in the month we will be speed running different versions of *Sonic* for charity. You can watch our Twitch stream at twitch.tv/WarezMyController.

Why do you think retro gaming remains popular?
Retro videogaming is an emotive experience. It doesn't offer the same cinematic immersion as current gen gaming but that isn't what it is about yet. What is retro to me in store by some people is considered 'vintage'. I love the 16-bit classics but there is also growing support for the N64, Dreamcast and Gamecube platforms now too. People find what they want to find in retro videogaming and a lot of the time it's about recapturing the feelings they had when they first experienced these platforms.


» Warez has moved into board gaming and is having success with regular *Magic: The Gathering* tournaments.


» Warez has a number of different game systems, but has a focus on consoles like the NES and Mega Drive.

Why have you decided to expand into boardgames?
Our aim is to be a 'full spectrum gaming store'. We enjoy the fact that we can mash up all areas of gaming whether it be videogames, tabletop or board games or even trading card games – all in to one place!

Is there any crossover between the two markets?
All gamers seem to share an appreciation of both sides of the store and when we hold an event for one or the other it sparks immediate interest from the other gamers. Fun is fun, no matter how you game.

Why do you think there are so few specialist shops around nowadays?
Specialist shops require specialist knowledge and if you were just in this for the money you would be found out as a charlatan straight away. You have to approach things correctly and build a community around your store and that takes time, effort and can be very tough. However, if you are willing to persevere, innovate and grow a community, anything is possible! *

> **"We enjoy the fact that we can mash up all areas of gaming"**
> Bradley Templeton


» There's plenty of stock available, so chances of finding something you want are high.

Find out more by visiting www.retrowarez.com


» A separate projector in the back of the store is where Warez holds most of its competitions.

Retro GAMER

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Kung Fu Master

■ Our latest Ultimate Guide rips apart Irem's cult arcade game and interviews the coder behind the Atari 2600 port.

Trashman

■ We speak to Malcolm Evans about his popular *Trashman* games and the third title that never came to be.

Speedball 2: Brutal Deluxe

■ After winning your vote for best Amiga game, we decided to ask Mike Montgomery how The Bitmap Brothers created its hit sequel.

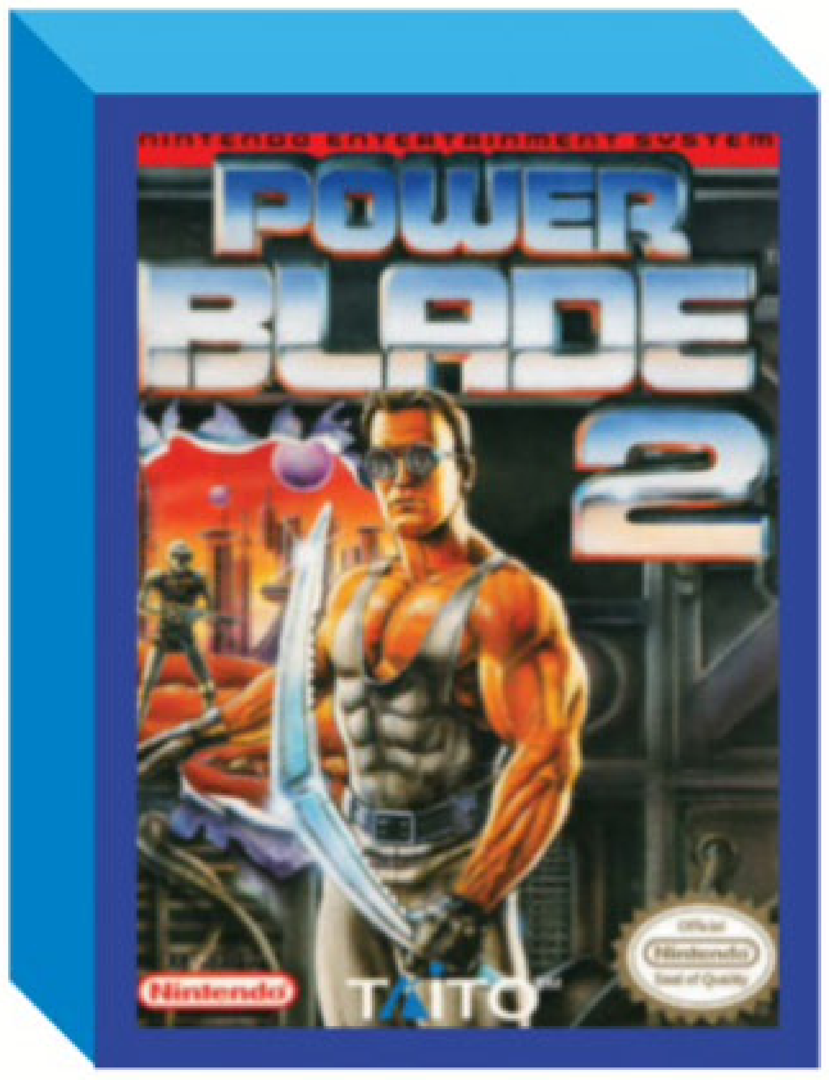
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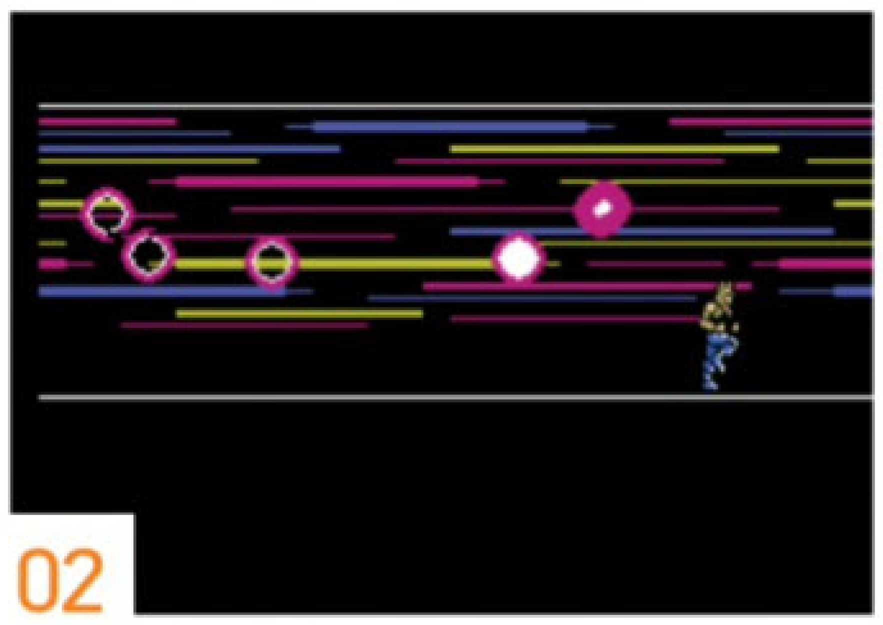
POWER BLADE 2

» After Power Blazer's localisation as Power Blade became a hit in North America, the top brass at Taito decided that a sequel was needed, and once again hired developer Natsume to do the job. Unfortunately, NOVA's second outing wasn't quite as good as his first – but since he's come all this way to destroy the Delta Foundation, we'll let him finish his story. We join NOVA after his victory over the final boss…



01

» NOVA has destroyed the cyborg soldier that the Delta Foundation was blackmailing the US government with. Wearing his best 'I'm not Arnie Schwarzenegger' facial expression, he declares his intention to blow up the base.



02

» As NOVA isn't a deceitful man, he sticks to his word, deploying the pyrotechnics and legging it against a backdrop of primary coloured streaks. In 2200, the logistics required for this are minimal and everything looks like a rock concert.



03

» Mankind is safe! Wait, hang on just a minute – the Delta Foundation was an arms manufacturer, which offered the USA first refusal on its new weapon. The USA didn't want it, but unilaterally decided that nobody else could have it either…




04

» Worse yet, the mission was conducted in secret. Nobody will ever know. Is this truth, justice, and the American way? Or the rather sinister destruction of a private company conducting legal business by a paranoid government? NOVA will have to contemplate on his own time, as the game's finished.


05

» Was the destruction of this cyborg really worth a prolonged period of US military hegemony? NOVA ponders this as dawn breaks, while riding his cool hoverbike into the distance. He does, however, find time to thank the players for acting as accomplices to his destructive deeds. You're welcome, we suppose…



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